



ANSWERING THE **TOUGH QUESTIONS** ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

DOESN'T SCIENCE
PROVIDE TRUTH WITHOUT
NEEDING GOD?

LESSON #
4

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

Many people reject God because they believe science can provide verifiable, truthful answers to all of life's important questions. Others compare science and faith as fact vs. fiction, reality vs. myth, etc. In other words, they believe science is the intelligent pursuit of truth using objective, verifiable evidence, while faith is the unintelligent, emotional reliance on superstition.

Some Christians also struggle with the role of science in their lives and often rationalize that science explains the "how," while the Bible explains the "who" and "why." However, this distinction is not always accurate because the Bible makes assertions of fact about the scientific world (e.g., the universe had a beginning and it will "perish" at some point, life began on earth in a specific sequence, there was a mass extinction that included humans, etc.) Science also often offers explanations for the "why" (e.g., animals have certain traits today because evolutionary processes made those adaptations successful).

In this lesson, we will help Christians understand that the belief that science determines truth, or "scientism," is a worldview that provides depressing conclusions to the questions a worldview must satisfactorily answer.

THINK ABOUT THIS

Doesn't empirical science provide all the truth we need, making a god unnecessary?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

LUKE 1:2-3; 1 JOHN 1:1-4 (*All Scripture is CSB unless otherwise noted.*)

THE MAIN IDEA

Pursuing truth is important to most people because we all want to "stand on solid ground" as we go through life. Unfortunately, many people turn to science as the sole source of truth, which leads to a worldview devoid of hope.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Many people will state that there is no empirical evidence for God. How would you respond to that statement?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

In both Luke 1:2-3 and 1 John 1:1-4, the writers explain that their information on Jesus's ministry is based on factual, eyewitness accounts from people who were with Jesus. In addition, archeological discoveries have validated other biblical accounts. Christians stand on firm ground in claiming that our faith is based on empirical evidence rather than mythical stories.



START HERE

Harry Kroto, a Nobel Laureate in chemistry and "devout atheist," stated in a 2011 speech to fellow Noble laureates,

I'm gonna talk about what science is because it's a totally misunderstood sort of subject. There are aspects of science which are important...But for me, the most important, by far, is it's the only philosophical construct we have to determine truth with any degree of reliability.¹

Kroto's observation reflects a common worldview - scientism. By definition, "[s]cientism is the belief that the scientific method is the only way to discover truth."² Some who hold to scientism will claim that science is superior to religion because it is based on "evidence."

When interacting with other people who hold to the scientism worldview (even if they don't realize it), we might hear comments like:

- I trust science to show me truth.
- Evidence produces truth.
- I can only know what my senses tell me.

CONVERSATION EXAMPLE

A co-worker states that he doesn't see any evidence for God, but he trusts science to provide truth since it relies on "hard" evidence. This lesson will help you see the flaws of that position and that only God provides reliable truth. How would you respond?

ADDING CLARITY

Most people think of "science" as uniform, but science can be divided into two categories: empirical and forensic. Christian apologist and theologian Norman Geisler writes that "[o]peration science deals with the world as it now exists and *origin science* deals with the past (Geisler, *Origin Science*, chapters 1, 6, 7). Operation science is an *empirical science* that deals with present regularities, but origin science is a *forensic science* that considers past

¹ Sharp, M. J. (2015). *Living in Truth* (p. 50). Lifeway Press.

² Geisler, N. (1999). *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (p. 702). Baker Books.



singularities - the origin of the universe and life forms."³ In other words, operational science is an empirical science that seeks to explain how things happen based on the empirical evidence obtained through the observation of repeatable current events (i.e., regularities), whereas origin science is a forensic science that seeks to explain past singular events such as the origin of life and the universe with theories and models that are based on forensic analysis of available evidence.

Another way to think of operational science is that it can be considered **objective** because conclusions are based on repeatable current evidence that is deemed factual. Many scientific "discoveries" are rejected when the evidence cannot be repeated. On the other hand, forensic science can be considered **subjective** because to be accepted by the scientific community, theories/models/predictions about past events are forced into the current origin models by academic "confirmation bias - people's tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with their existing beliefs."⁴

Christians may have little disagreement with many operational science conclusions (e.g., gravity is a real, measurable force, etc.) However, there can be much disagreement with forensic science because most conclusions are based on the prevalence of a naturalism worldview within academia, which holds to the faith assumption that the physical world is the only reality; therefore, all explanations that include a supernatural cause are arbitrarily rejected.

People who put their faith in science often have a mistaken view about the quality of the "truth" science provides. Instead of truth that is always true, science, at best, provides the most probable explanation for observable events based on current understanding, and all scientific claims are falsifiable (i.e., the ability to test a claim and prove it false). Thus, most accepted scientific discoveries are not facts despite arrogant proclamations to the contrary but are a scientist's "explanatory model" that best fits with experiments and data.

REVIEW AND DISCUSS

1. CHRISTIANITY IS BASED ON EVIDENCE, JUST LIKE SOME SCIENCE.

At the very beginning of his gospel, Luke states,

*³ So it also seemed good to me, since I have **carefully investigated** everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so that you*

³ Ibid. 567.

⁴ Casad, B. J., & Luebering, J. E. (2023). Confirmation bias. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved November 9, 2024, from <https://www.britannica.com/science/confirmation-bias>.



may **know the certainty** of the things about which you have been instructed. (emphasis added) (Luke 1:3-4)

Luke realized that, like all past singular events, the life of Jesus could not be repeatedly observed, so he set out to record the recollections of those who were direct observers of the events in his letter to Theophilus. Other biblical authors did the same by recording past events that included eyewitness evidence, as described in 1 John 1:1-4,

¹ What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— ³ what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

In addition to eyewitness evidence, we shall see in the coming weeks that circumstantial evidence supports, among other things, the historical accuracy of biblical accounts, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Both eyewitness and circumstantial evidence may be submitted to a court of law and used to render a verdict beyond a reasonable doubt. Thus, Christianity is not based on blind faith and myths, but on evidence of God's power that resulted in the explosive growth of the early church.

DISCUSS

What other convincing evidence helps you believe that Jesus really died for you? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

2. SCIENTISM IS A FAITH.

Despite his intellectual credentials, Kroto's statement that science is the only way to find truth is not a statement backed by science. No scientific method can prove that the methods of science are the **only** way to know truth. Thus, if we adhere to Kroto's own requirement that truth must be backed by science, his conclusion cannot be relied upon as truth.

One part of Kroto's speech that is correct, however, is his observation that "science" is a philosophical construct or, in other words, a matter of belief/faith. According to J.P Moreland in his book *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity*, this faith in scientism is based on philosophical presuppositions including:



1. Science must assume that the human mind is rational, and the universe is rational in such a way that the mind can know it.
2. Science must assume that truth exists and thus the laws of logic are true, numbers are true, and language can adequately relay truth.
3. Science must assume that truth-telling is an absolute moral virtue, and experimental results are thus reported honestly ⁵

Because of these underlying philosophical assumptions, scientism is a matter of faith and should not be assumed as superior to other faiths because it is intellectually appealing. It should be evaluated just as any other worldview: Does it provide satisfying answers to the worldview questions about life?

DISCUSS

What can we say to someone who trusts science to provide truth that helps them see that it is a faith based on a historically unreliable source – mankind's understanding of the universe? (Possible answers: "What is the current scientific explanation for the origin of life?" "How is that proven scientifically?" "Help me understand how you came to that conclusion," etc.)

3. CHRISTIANITY PROVIDES MORE SATISFYING ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS A WORLDVIEW MUST ANSWER.

The first of the four questions a worldview must reasonably answer is "Where did I come from?" The answer to this question is based on how a person answers the fundamental life question: "Who's in charge?" Where a Christian worldview sees a common Designer in the created living world around us, a naturalist scientist sees a godless evolutionary process from a common ancestor.

Since neither "first cause" can be proven objectively, both perspectives are matters of faith and philosophy, not science. To be true to their worldview, an adherent of scientism must answer the four worldview questions this way:

Question

Where did I come from?

Answer

I have faith that I and everything around me are the result of random chance.

⁵ Moreland, J. P. (1998). *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (p. 197–98). Baker Book House.



What is my purpose?	I have no primary purpose other than to perpetuate my DNA in future generations.
How should I behave?	I do whatever is necessary to acquire scarce resources so my offspring will survive.
Where am I going?	Back to the dirt from which I came; there is nothing after this life.

Note that people who hold this worldview also have "faith" that science will eventually discover how inanimate (lifeless) matter accidentally became living matter. Their "faith" is based on the belief that given enough time, anything can happen, regardless of how preposterous.

In contrast, a Christian can answer these four questions much differently:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Answer</u>
Where did I come from?	I have faith that I am the workmanship of a creator God. (Ephesians 2:10a)
What is my purpose?	God has good works He has planned for me to do. (Ephesians 2:10b)
How should I behave?	Love God with all my heart, mind, body, and strength. Love others as myself. (Mark 12:34-35)
Where am I going?	Since I have Jesus as my Savior, I have eternal, perfected fellowship with God in Heaven. (John 3:16)

Philosophically speaking, the first worldview is dire and hopeless, whereas the Christian worldview is complete with faith, love, and hope. No wonder Peter was sure people would ask us for "*the reason for the hope that we have.*" (I Peter 3:15)

DISCUSS

How would people you know answer these worldview questions? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

GOSPEL FOCUS



When talking with people who hold a view that science is superior to religion, these discussions can be an excellent opportunity to make the distinction between "religion" and a relationship/fellowship with God through Christ.

Many non-believers have the misconception that Christianity is all about a bunch of arbitrary rules. It is easy to see how they reach this conclusion because it is true of other religions that promise various concepts of eternity determined by how well an individual does the "dos" and avoids the "don'ts." As we will learn in more detail in Lesson 5:

- Hinduism - elimination of bad karmic debt through good works during multiple lifetimes via reincarnation allows one to reach unity with the Absolute and cease to exist as an individual.
- Islam - In the hadith corpus [teachings of Muhammad] and Quran, the way to atone for sins is called tawba (or tawbah), which requires one to complete a series of complex steps to receive forgiveness from Allah. However, one can circumvent tawba and its requirements by giving their life in religious holy war, or jihad.⁶ The worthiness of these actions is entirely up to the judgment of Allah, and there is no assurance pending that decision except for the martyr.

Christianity, however, is radically different. Through true Christianity, God invites people to join His family and have fellowship with Him that starts when a person accepts Christ as their Savior, and it continues for eternity. This family relationship is not based on what a person does but on what Christ did on the cross. Our fellowship grows as we become a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), and we begin to change the way we think (Romans 12:2, NLT) so that we want to do God's will not because we are under the compulsion of rules, but because we want to love Him as He loved us.

DISCUSS

What can you share about your daily fellowship with God that would make your faith attractive to a non-believer? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

REFLECT ON THE LESSON

⁶ Rinehart, C. (2021, June 15). *Escaping Atonement in Sunni Islam*. Marine Corp University Press. Retrieved November 9, 2024, from <https://www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/Expeditions-with-MCUP-digital-journal/Escaping-Atonement-in-Sunni-Islam/>.



Christians may feel inadequate to talk to people more knowledgeable in science than they are. In many cases, the discussion can often get "lost in the weeds" of some obscure issue.

One approach to avoid this cycle of never-ending discussions is to keep the discussion at the "30,000 ft level" by bringing them back to the question, "What do you hope to gain by your quest?" The objective is to help them see the hopelessness of their pursuit of truth through knowledge and wisdom. In the end, what does it matter?

Solomon can serve as a role model for people like this. He was recognized as the world's leader in wisdom and knowledge, yet he reached a surprising conclusion in Ecclesiastes 1:16-17,

*¹⁶I said to myself, "See, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; **I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind.** (emphasis added)*

DISCUSS

How does your life demonstrate the hope that you have in Christ and the joy that having fellowship with God gives you each day? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

RESPOND

The world today seems to demand a choice - either science or religion. However, this is a false distinction because Christians can marvel at the wonder of God's handiwork through the increased understanding that scientific advances provide.

DISCUSS

How can you show those around you that you are unafraid of science ever explaining God away? (Possible answers: Various personal responses).

APPLY

Who in your "sphere of influence" relies on science to provide truth? What preparations do you need to take to engage them in a spiritual discussion?



LOOKING TO NEXT WEEK...

WHICH GOD DO I CHOOSE?

A person's worldview is their way of understanding what they see, hear, and experience in life. The foundation for a worldview is how a person answers the basic question of life: "Who's in charge?"

Based on the previous lessons, we can at least say it is reasonable to believe in a god. The next logical question would be, "Which god do I believe in?"

Next week, we will explore various worldviews that believe in the supernatural but have different ideas about a god, how a god relates to creation/mankind, and our ultimate destination. These religions are some of the fastest growing in American culture; thus, the chance increases that we will interact with someone holding these "faiths." We need to know how to respond to people who "see" their god differently than we see God.

GENERAL RESOURCES

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*