

# IS GOD GUILTY OF FRAUD?

## Chapter 7

### Science and Faith

People live in a competitive world, even those who do not like to “compete.” From young ages, people play games and sports, engaging in friendly, and not so friendly competition. Winning and losing are deeply imbedded in the human psyche. The Darwinians will go so far as to say that competition is in the DNA. Citing “natural selection” a core tenet of evolution is the competitive idea that those who are most fit for the day and age will outlast and survive those less fit. The famous British biologist Hebert Spencer (1820-1903) called this, “survival of the fittest.”

Into this reality that readily finds things in competition, comes the issue of God and the corresponding relationship between faith and science. Some believe that faith is averse to science, as if the two convictions are in competition. A list of prominent atheists list faith as a concept that can’t co-exist in science. Richard Dawkins goes so far as to claim that, “faith is belief in the teeth of evidence.”<sup>1</sup> He, and many others, set faith on one side of a teetertotter and science on the other. For Dawkins, the “science” side of the teetertotter is heavily loaded with “evidence,” i.e., “fact,” while the “faith” side is whisper thin, a vapor holding only wishful and fanciful thoughts of the uninformed and deceived.

#### The Cynic’s Competitive View



Two prominent examples of the cynic’s competitive view generally find expression in the arenas of evolution and medicine. Each of these views are worthy of merit as one examines the claims of God to determine if claims for faith are based on reality

<sup>1</sup> Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p 198.

or fraud. I think a careful examination will show that the cynics accusations are based on faulty reasoning as well as a misunderstanding of the claims of God and faith. From a Biblical perspective, faith and science aren't competitors, they are teammates. They don't exist in juxtaposition to each other on a teeter totter, they properly exist as compliments to each other. Before explaining my reasoning, it is important to more fully set out the problem and potential accusations against God on this subject.

## **THE PROBLEM**

I am not a scientist. I am a lawyer by trade, a husband and father by practice, and one who dabbles in many areas by hobby. Even though I am not a scientist, my life is affected by science all day long. I am typing this lesson on my laptop, a product of great scientific work. I am sitting in a Chick-fil-A. The lights overhead, the air conditioning, the Styrofoam cup holding my drink, and the car I drove here are all products of science. Science infuses almost every aspect of my life, even though I am not a scientist. I may not think in terms of science, but the thoughtful and rationale manipulation of nature is central to my existence.

Where was faith in all of this? Some might say, I had faith in getting into the car and starting it. I didn't rationally think it through, I just got in trusting and expecting it would work. That may be called "faith," but it is faith in science, not God. So the more specific question is, "Where was faith in God in all of this?" (It should not be lost on the reader that faith in God is what drove me to get up and take my computer to Chick-fil-A to type on this lesson. But more on that later...)

Many may not be thinking in terms of "science" and "faith," especially those who aren't involved in the disciplines of either subject, but even the most non-scientific or non-believing person has times where she or he considers the interplay of faith and science. For some that happens when growing up, trying to understand who we are and where we came from. For some, that happens when faced with a health crisis, trying to figure out what to do while desperately scared, staring mortality in the face.

These two areas of evolution and medicine are prime candidates for understanding the issues that are often placed at opposite ends of the teeter totter.

### *Evolution or Creation*

How did we get here? From an earliest age, most everyone asks that question. As young children become self-aware, and as they enter the inquisitive stage, many ask their parents, "Where did I come from?" The parents then begin the process of explaining on some level how children come to be. Before long, the question gets

dated further back. The question is no longer, “How did *I* get here?” but becomes, “How did the first person get here?” For some extra bright or well-informed kids, it might even be, “How did the first *two* people get here?”, recognizing it takes two to produce offspring.

This question can get answered in a variety of ways, but ultimately most teach a child either that humanity evolved from some primates we typically call “apes,” or that humanity was created by God. The questioning doesn’t always end there either.

For those parents who say that people came from apes, the logical question that follows is, “Where did apes come from?” This begins the succession of answers that chart the current version of the evolutionary chain taking humanity through apes, through uncountable genetic alterations until one has a fish climbing out of the sea. The questioning continues back further until some pre-life soup of wet chemicals forms protein strands that are charged to life in some way. (Although in fairness, some well-informed parents might have an asteroid landing on earth at the right place and time bringing some progeniture of primitive life to seed the earth. Of course, then one must ask where the asteroid got the seeds of life.) Eventually, one works back through cosmic stardust, assembling the universe itself from some compact substance that exploded in a big bang, hurtling matter throughout space. The musings on the genesis of the matter that exploded in that big bang is still debated among the cosmologists.

For those parents who say that God created life, the questioning doesn’t always end either. I can remember in third grade asking my mother, “Then where did God come from?” My wise mother answered, “That is part of what God is... one who isn’t created, but one who has always been.” When I expressed that I didn’t understand that, mom added that I was created, so my mind had trouble comprehending one who wasn’t created. On a very basic level, my mom was teaching me the idea that God exists outside of this creation, so the creation becomes an expression of work by God, rather than something self-generated.

### *Medicine*

Another way faith and science are set against each other is found in the realm of medicine. When one is sick, should one find solace and healing by faith or by medicine? Does one simply need to pray and trust God, or does one need to go to the doctor and leave prayer behind?

The Bible is replete with examples of people being healed by God. Consider Matthew’s gospel recounting key moments in the life and ministry of Jesus. Matthew starts with Jesus’s genealogy and birth. Shifting nearly 30 years, Matthew then sets out the calling of Jesus into ministry and the temptations to choose another path in life. Jesus chooses the path of God, and Matthew then gives a summary verse of Jesus’ life:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people (Mt. 4:23).

Matthew expands that summary station with Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, followed by Jesus healing disease and affliction. In the first chapter after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus heals a leper, heals a paralytic, heals a woman who lies sick with a fever, and brings sanity to a man demon-possessed. In the midst of all that healing, Jesus also takes on the physics of nature, calming a great storm that threatened his boat.

All of those miracles, and most seemed tied in some way to faith. The storm that threatened Jesus and his followers was a concern to the scared disciples because they were “of little faith” (Mt. 8:26). The paralytic was healed with Jesus remarking at the faith of the one asking for help. Jesus healed the paralytic at the moment of Jesus explaining,

“Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” (Mt. 8:13).

As a result of these and many other passages, various people have developed religious beliefs that set up a conflict in treating medical conditions that are at odds with the best understanding of doctors and the medical community. A 2005 study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* noted that,

Conflict introduced by religion is common and occurs in 3 types of settings: (1) those in which religious doctrines directly conflict with medical recommendations, (2) those that involve an area in which there is extensive controversy within the broader society, and (3) settings of relative medical uncertainty in which patients “choose faith over medicine.”<sup>2</sup>

In the first category of conflict, the most cited example were Jehovah Witnesses refusing to allow blood transfusions believing it against Scripture. The second category of conflict were ethical decisions about ending life or dealing with pre-natal problems in consideration of terminating a pregnancy when one knows the child will be still born or will die briefly after birth. But the largest area of conflict was found in the third category.

The most frequently described domain for conflict is one in which a patient expresses no moral objection to the therapy offered but still “chooses faith over medicine.” “I have had patients,” the theme went,

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<sup>2</sup> Farr A. Curlin, MD; Chad J. Roach, BS; Rita Gorawara-Bhat, PhD; et al, “When Patients Choose Faith Over Medicine”, *Archives of Internal Medicine* (Jan. 10, 2005), p 88.

“who, when faced with a diagnosis that there was a traditional treatment for, chose instead to rely on faith and prayer [interview 15].”

The doctors described patients who “trust God more than they trust us.” One example was a patient who refused a colonoscopy after hundreds of polyps were revealed by screening, “because she and her daughter believed in the power of prayer.” Others refused or delayed treatment for conditions believing, “It’s in God’s hands.” Some refused important tests explaining, “I know God will provide – I don’t need that test.” Some put off tests. One doctor told of the problem of a lady diagnosed with breast cancer who declined treatment, choosing instead to simply pray on it. The doctor found that tragic, knowing that six months would dramatically change the profile of what might be done medically for the woman.

These are issues that should be confronted by people of faith. We should consider what we believe is the correct course of action in the midst of medical decisions. But at the center of this is the first basic question: where is God in all of this? Does God direct us to be “people of faith” instead of “people of medicine or science”? Or is this a false choice? I believe this is a false dichotomy. Faith versus science should not exist in competition. The Biblical view has those two on the same team. Faith and science sit on the same side of the teeter-totter.

## **A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SCIENCE**

A proper Biblical view of science rightly finds itself in the early chapters of Genesis, but not necessarily the way one might think! One can glean much by delving into the verses of creation, but more specific roots of the interaction of humanity and science find roots are found in the story of the Garden of Eden and the fall of Adam and Eve.

The storyline is well known, but a few details aren’t always clearly emphasized. God has created Adam and placed him in a lush garden. God then gives Adam a clear charge:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it (Gen. 2:15).

This was humanity’s responsibility. It was two-fold. Humanity was to “work” the garden and “keep” the garden. The Hebrew words are instructive. Working the garden is the Hebrew verb *avad* (עָבַד). This verb speaks to laboring, like tilling a

field or tending a vineyard, but it also speaks to serving, as one might be called to serve God.<sup>3</sup>

Humanity's charge from the beginning was to do that work in the world that under service to God, would bring about the fruits of nature. The charge, however, wasn't simply to work the earth, but also to "keep" it. The Hebrew word translated "keep" is the verb *shamar* (שָׁמַר), often the first verb Hebrew students learn when conjugating verbs! This word also has a broad semantic range, speaking to one having responsibility or charge over something (the garden, a flock, etc.). But importantly, it also speaks of one watching or observing something with intelligence reasoning. Consider the word in these two contexts (the Hebrew verb *shamar* is italicized and bolded for clarity):

1. Jacob tells his father-in-law that as a part of a deal for a daughter in marriage, "I will again pasture your flock and ***keep*** it" (Gen. 30:31).
2. The priest Eli watches the barren mother of Samuel praying for a child, "As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli ***observed*** her mouth."

In the first passage above, one readily sees the idea in the verb being to have charge over a flock, tending to their care. But in the second passage, one sees the struggle translating the verb as "keep" because the usage there is more oriented to the idea in the verb of "watching carefully and with intelligence." Of course, if one is to properly tend to sheep, one must be watching them carefully and thoughtfully, but we lose that aspect of the word if we aren't careful.

In the full sense of *shamar*, humanity is instructed from the beginning to not only work in the earth, but to intelligently observe the earth as a part and parcel of working it. To a scientist, we can perhaps best translate this Hebrew idea of *shamar* in ways that echo typical language of the "scientific method."

The "scientific method" is the method that is given to scientific discovery and processing often dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. Although philosophers of science debate the merits of details within the scientific method, the general approach of "(1) observation, (2) hypothesis, and (3) testing" as the method is taught today in most every scientific textbook.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, Francis, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew And English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Hendrickson Publishers 1996), "שָׁמַר".

<sup>4</sup> A good review of this is found in, Blachowicz, James, "How Science Textbooks Treat Scientific Method: A Philosopher's Perspective", *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* (June 2009), pp. 303-334.

The charge of Adam to “keep” the garden includes the ideas of “observing” the garden intelligently, with any eye toward doing the work necessary to keep the garden in its fullness.

The backdrop for science in our world today grows as we consider the later development of the account of Adam and Eve. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, bringing sin and its consequences to the forefront. God had warned them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As the ESV translates it,

Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Gen. 2:17).

Without burdening the reader too much with Hebrew, the word translated “day” (*yom* - יום) has a full range of meaning from an actual 24-hour day to an “age” or “era.” One may fairly see it as a period of time. God instructed, and as the story unfolds we see, that eating of the forbidden fruit would bring about an age of death. That era of death is where humanity lives from the expulsion of the garden until today. This is a critical underpinning to a Christian view of science and worthy of unfolding a bit more.

The consequences inherent in the world in the era of death are found in the things around us as well as the implications of those things on humanity. No longer are we fully in control of nature, working and keeping it. Now we are often at its mercy. As God explained the curses that sin brought forth in the age of death, pain is present and multiplied in childbirth, the toil associated with bringing food from a cursed land of death is greatly multiplied as well, and ultimately, people will die.

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.... And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:16-19).

This era of death was not without promise, however. God promised that through the offspring of woman would come one who at personal cost, would crush the head of the tempter who aided in bringing about this tragedy (Gen. 3:15).

Into this world, the Biblical view of science properly unfolds. From a Biblical perspective, science is an understanding of how God’s nature works, with a realization that humanity is responsible for learning such things and putting them to

work. This Biblical responsibility is heightened by the era of death where humanity lives. People are not to be complacent about the pain and horrors of the age. People should know that pain and difficulties in life are results of sin, not what was made by God as the ideal for life. Science, in its Biblical perspective, then is humanity's tool for fighting against the misery of the consequences of sin. With science humanity can attempt to alleviate some of the suffering and pain in this world. Science can help people find better ways to grow food in spite of what nature might otherwise dictate.

This Biblical view of science is foundational to understanding why science and faith are not at odds. Science isn't on one side of a teetertotter set against faith. Science is faith's tool to conquer the monster unleashed on the happiness and fulfillment of humanity. Properly used, science can alleviate levels of want and need, make life more comfortable and less painful, heal diseases and restore health. Science isn't a panacea that restores Eden. But in the era of death, science can work toward a better world and better living. That is a godly accomplishment!

### **A Biblical View of Science**

Science is faith's physical tool for fighting the physical pain and difficulties of the fallen world.

Sometimes science can win, sometimes it can't.



### **IMPLICATIONS**

*To be continued....*