

Review: “Defeater Beliefs”

- A **defeater belief** is an assumption which, if it were true, would make Christianity impossible or repulsive. They are “beliefs of the culture that lead listeners to find some Christian doctrines implausible or overtly offensive.”¹
- How to discern defeater beliefs:
 - Ask: “What makes it hard for you to believe in Christianity?”
“Do you wish Christianity were true? ...Why not?”
“Okay, so if we find reasonable answer to this hard question, are you saying you would be willing to believe in Jesus?”
 - Observe: Are there commitments and/or relationships in your friend’s life that may be the *real* obstacle to faith in Jesus Christ?
“Can I ask you an honest question... could it really be X?”
- Goal: knowing only God can change a heart (Jn. 6:44), and that God especially uses the Word to change hearts (Rom. 10:17), we seek to remove intellectual barriers in the hopes of bringing others to a point of willingness to read the Bible with a sincere, teachable spirit.
- In our first two weeks in this unit, we covered two major defeater beliefs:
 - #1 – “The Bible is Impossible!”
 - #2 – “How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?”
 - This week we move on to #3 – “Science Has Disproved the Bible.”
- Rule: **Behind every forceful objection lies a hidden assumption.**
- Method: *When you encounter a forceful objection to the gospel, ask yourself...*
“Why does this objection feel powerful?”
“What must one assume in order for it to resonate?”

¹ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle ed., loc 3298

Defeater Belief #3: “Science Has Disproved the Bible”²

- What sort of assumptions does this objection make?
 - Science is based on evidence – which is the opposite of Christian faith.
 - Miracles are scientifically impossible.
 - Evolution and/or an old earth makes Christianity impossible, *and*
 - There is no proof for a supernatural world or God.

Note: many of these assumptions are not based on personal research, but unthinking acceptance of propaganda!

- “The conflict model of the relationship of science to religion was a deliberate exaggeration used by both scientists and educational leaders at the end of the nineteenth century to undermine the church’s control of their institutions and increase their own cultural power.”³
- In reality, there are four major views on how science and religion intersect:

	Incompatible	Compatible
Non-Christian	<u>“Hard” Atheism</u> The results of modern science demonstrate that biblical claims about the creation of the universe and humanity are completely untenable.	<u>“Soft” Atheism / Agnosticism</u> The Bible was not intended as a scientific text, but as the “origin story” of the Hebrews. Its claims should be treated as mythological rather than scientific.
Christian	<u>Separatist Fundamentalism</u> Since at least the days of Charles Darwin, science has more or less categorically sold out to the world and therefore should be regarded with suspicion.	<u>Evangelical Concordism</u> All truth is God’s truth, therefore there can be no conflict between faithful biblical interpretation and rational scientific inquiry. Believers should engage in the scientific enterprise. This results in a spectrum of believing scientific opinion.

- Two key points to note from this chart:
 - Christians who disparage science are playing into hands of hard atheism!
 - Christians who embrace Scripture and science may differ in opinions!

² Much of what we will discuss today can be found in chapters 6 and 9, “Science Has Disproved Christianity” and “The Knowledge of God,” in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 84-96 and 143-158.

³ Keller, 89, citing Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (University of California Press, 2003).

Assumption 1:

Science is based on evidence, which is the opposite of Christian faith.

- The scientific method and scientific observation make faith commitments:
 - The reliability of our senses,
 - The reality of the external world, *and*
 - The validity of the laws of logic and reason.

Think about it: can you *prove* that you are *not* living your whole life in a computer-generated simulation?

- Christian faith bases everything on an observed, historical fact:

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:16-19)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15:3-6)

- **So it is naïve to claim that science requires no faith commitments, and erroneous to claim that Christianity does not rely on evidence.**

Assumption 2: Miracles are scientifically impossible.

- “It is one thing to say that science is only equipped to test for natural causes and cannot speak to any others. It is quite another to insist that science proves that no other causes could possibly exist.”⁴

Fact	False Conclusion
There are miracles in the Bible that science cannot <i>explain</i> .	Therefore the miracles in the Bible cannot actually <i>exist</i> .
Creation, miracles, and the resurrection are scientifically <i>inexplicable</i> .	Therefore creation, miracles, and the resurrection are physically <i>impossible</i> .
Hidden assumption that leads from the facts to the false conclusion: Natural phenomena cannot have supernatural causes.	

- “There would be no experimental model for testing the statement: ‘No supernatural cause for any natural phenomenon is possible.’ **It is therefore a philosophical presupposition and not a scientific finding.**”⁵

⁴ Keller, 85.

⁵ Keller, 86 (emphasis added).

Assumption 3: Evolution and/or an old earth make Christianity impossible.

- *First*, in facing this assumption, it's important to remember:
 - The influence of 'tribal' factors. "A lot of people who accept evolution or an old earth also espouse political views that I hate... this view must be false because the wrong people believe it."
 - The danger of valuing cultural respectability over divine revelation.
"If I hold to this position, people will think I'm an idiot – or a traitor!"
- *Second* in facing this assumption, it's important to remember that, when it comes to facts of history or nature, science and theology are focused on different questions using different tools:
 - Science focuses on, "How?" using sensory observation.
 - Theology focuses on, "What?" and "Why?" using biblical data.
 - Example: why do we have seasons?
 - Science: "The earth is tilted on its axis and orbits the sun."
 - Theology: "Yet [God] did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:17)"
- *Third*, a belief in biblical inerrancy requires us to interpret each portion of the Bible according to its *genre*. What type of writing are we reading? The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) explains:

History must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed.⁶
- *Fourth*, there are legitimate disagreements among Bible-believing Christians as to whether Genesis 1-2 is written as strict or poetic history. Because of this honest disagreement, there exist a spectrum of Bible-believing views:
 - Young Earth – correct science will find an age for the earth of 6,000-10,000 years
 - Created Age – distinguishes between *maturation* and *duration*, thus Adam was 35 years *mature* and 1 minute *old*. The sun could be 4.6 billion years *mature* and less than 10,000 years *old*.
 - Framework – Genesis 1-2 focus more on *theology* and not on *chronology*. The age of the earth is not the primary focus of the text.
 - Theistic evolution – God created out of nothing – rejects worldview of *materialism*.
God created using evolution – retains evolutionary as *mechanism*.

⁶ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>

- *Fifth*, it is important, especially in apologetics and evangelism, not to allow this issue to distract us from the core claim of the New Testament:

Since Christian believers occupy different positions on both the meaning of Genesis 1 and on the nature of evolution, those who are considering Christianity as a whole should not allow themselves to be distracted by this intramural debate. The skeptical inquirer does not need to accept any one of these positions in order to embrace the Christian faith. Rather, he or she should concentrate on and weigh the central claims of Christianity. Only after drawing conclusions about the person of Christ, the resurrection, and the central tenets of the Christian message should one think through the various options with regard to creation and evolution.⁷

- One way to keep focus: “*Could* God have created in this way? Yes. *Did* he create in that particular way? I don’t know. The more important question is this: did Jesus Christ rise from the dead and prove that *he* is both my and your Creator?”

- **Evolution and/or an old earth have created cultural conflict for Christians, but they do not make Christianity theological impossible.**

Assumption 4: There is no proof for a supernatural world or God.⁸

- If the universe is nothing beyond matter and energy (materialism), and all life arose from impersonal physical laws, then even the human sense of moral obligation is nothing but a chemical phenomenon. Life is truly pointless:

The whole span of human civilization, even if it lasts a few million years, will be just an infinitesimally brief spark in relation to the oceans of dead time that preceded it and will follow it. There will be no one around to remember any of it. Whether we are loving or cruel in the end would make no difference at all. (157)

- If this is so, then moral obligation dissolves. Why believe in human rights? Can a majority population vote to exterminate the minority? **Why not?**

If you believe human rights are a reality, then it makes much more sense that God exists than that he does not. If you insist on a secular view of the world and yet you continue to pronounce some things right and some things wrong, then I hope you see the deep disharmony between the world your intellect has devised and the real world (and God) that your heart knows exists. This leads us to a crucial question. If a premise (“There is no God”) leads to a conclusion you know isn’t true (“Naplaming babies is culturally relative”) then *why not change the premise?* (156)

- **Only belief in God makes sense of our universal sense that life has meaning, and that moral obligation is real.**

⁷ Keller, 94.

⁸ Here we summarize Keller, 143.158.