

# 10 Hard Questions

*“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”  
(1 Peter 3:14–16 ESV)*

*“be ready in season and out of season...”  
(2 Timothy 4:2 ESV)*

## **Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?**

**May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

**1 Peter 3:14-15**

**John 3:11-15**

**Rev. Paul Carter**

### **Introduction:**

Well good morning church! It's good to be with you again today. Let's begin where we have begun for each of the previous 3 messages in this series. Let's begin by reading together from 1 Peter 3:14-15. This is the Word of the Lord:

“But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:14–15 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

Peter tells his people: always be prepared to make a defense – that's what this entire series is about. As we've mentioned a few times, apologetics is basically evangelism against opposition. If people were born receptive to the Gospel then apologetics would not exist as a concept. But the Bible says that people are not born open to the Gospel. They are not wandering around in the desert looking for the road home. That is simply not how the Bible speaks about the human condition. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside ... and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:10–18 ESV)

Now why is there no fear of God before their eyes? Because they are not looking for God! They’re looking away from God so that they can be as gods unto themselves.

That’s what the Bible says.

And so when we try and present the Gospel to people they don’t always receive that with open arms – in fact often they will deflect and push back and counter attack with things they’ve heard on the internet, or things they saw on YouTube – and so if you want to continue the conversation you have to understand those counter attacks and be prepared to absorb them and deflect them so as to once again press upon your friends and loved ones the urgency of dealing with the truth claims of Jesus Christ.

Now, I realize that some of us don’t like that kind of language. It feels confrontational – it feels unCanadian – and yet the text we’re looking at ASSUMES a certain level of confrontation. Peter says – always be prepared to make a defense. Paul goes even further, he says:

“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV)

So make no mistake, this is spiritual warfare brothers and sisters – and that’s why we were given the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God - so I think we need to wrap our heads around this. We need to expect opposition and we need to know how to press through that opposition in order to get to that second, third and fourth conversation about Jesus with our friends and loved ones.

So that’s what this message is about - and it’s a tall order so as much as possible I want to try and keep it simple today. Let’s assume that after your initial presentation of the Christian Gospel your friend or loved one is going to respond with this very common counter stroke:

## But hasn't science disproved Christianity?

As I said, that is something that folks hear on the internet or that they encounter out in culture. Stephen Pinker for example, in his book *Enlightenment Now: The Case For Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* says:

“The findings of science imply that the belief systems of all the world’s religions and cultures ... are factually mistaken.”<sup>1</sup>

Wow! That’s a pretty scary statement. So what are you going to do when your loved one says something like that to you?

At the risk of over-simplification I’m going to suggest a very basic three step approach. To stick with the metaphor here of spiritual warfare, I’m going to suggest that you block, parry and counterstrike. Let me walk you through each of those.

### 1. Block (What is science?)

The first thing you want to do is block – meaning you want to STOP the thrust of that objection in its tracks. In my experience most people who repeat such things – and most people who believe that science has disproved Christianity have very little understanding as to what science is and what it does and therefore they tend to make VASTLY exaggerated claims about its scope and authority.

So let’s block that. Let’s blunt the force of that objection – just by asking a very simple question:

What is science?

The Oxford English Dictionary that sits on my shelf defines science this way:

“The systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case For Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* as cited in Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 109.

observation and experiment.”<sup>2</sup>

So science has a much narrower purview than most people on the street tend to realize. Science – by definition – is the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the PHYSICAL and NATURAL world – through observation and experiment.

And thus, SCIENCE, is not the ideal TOOL for evaluating the claims of Christianity – many of which have to do with realities BEYOND the physical and natural world – and most ACTUAL scientists know this very well. William Poundstone for example says:

“In an infinite universe, proving a negative hypothesis is a supertask. (If the universe is merely finite but very big, proving a negative hypothesis is a herculean labor so close to a supertask as to make no difference.) We are incapable of supertasks, and have reason to be suspicious of knowledge attainable only through supertasks anyway.”<sup>3</sup>

What he is saying here is that science cannot PROVE that God doesn’t exist. How could science do that? In order to do that someone would have to look everywhere in the physical universe and then declare that God had not been found in any of the places that were searched. That’s how science works! And since we only have access to a tiny fragment of an absolutely massive universe – why in the world would anyone make that claim?

And who said that God existed in the physical universe anyway? 1 Timothy 6:15-16 describes God as:

“he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,<sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:15–16 ESV)

So God – according to the Bible – dwells in unapproachable light – and he cannot be seen – which is to say that he cannot be LOCATED in any of the places that human beings can LOOK! He is therefore by definition beyond the scope of scientific inquiry.

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<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), “science”.

<sup>3</sup> William Poundstone, *Labyrinths of Reason: Paradox, Puzzles, and the Frailty of Knowledge* as cited in R.C. Sproul, *Not A Chance*, (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2014), 60.

So let's BLOCK that attack straight away. Science simply does not have the tools to FALSIFY Christianity – and any honest scientist will tell you that.

But of course Christianity has to do with more than just the knowledge of God – so suppose your friend was willing to concede that science could not falsify what the Bible says about God – perhaps then he would shift his aim and suggest that science CAN and HAS falsified what the Bible says about humanity.

And of course your friend would be right in identifying those two subjects as the main focus of Christian wisdom. John Calvin famously opened his defense of Christianity to the King of France by saying:

“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

So has science disproved what the Bible says about humanity?

Well let's look at what the Bible says. The bible says that God made men and women in his image and likeness.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

The bible says that people are not simply more advanced animals. They are unique. They are creatures of enormous dignity and purpose.

That's what the bible says.

Has science disproved that? Many people on the street seem to believe that science has proven an alternative theory of the origin of life but that would be news to most scientists. Dr. James Tour, Professor of Materials Science and NanoEngineering at Rice University confesses freely:

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<sup>4</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), paragraph 221.

“Science has not come close to explaining the origin of life.”<sup>5</sup>

There are ideas and hypotheses but none of them have been proven and none of them are widely accepted within the scientific community as settled fact. Again – because establishing such a fact would be a SUPERTASK and it would strain the effective range of actual science. Remember, science is:

“The systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.”<sup>6</sup>

Through observation and experiment – but how then could we claim to know anything about something that only happened once that no one was there to see? And the answer is that we can’t know and we don’t know.

But what about evolution?

Doesn’t evolution prove that human beings were the result of a long chain of gradual developments that began in some kind of primordial stew?

But actually, evolution doesn’t go back as far as most people tend to think it does. The original title of the book by Charles Darwin that started the movement was actually:

“On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle For Life”.

Interestingly, the schools almost never quote the full title of that book nowadays, because while they might want you to become an atheist they certainly don’t want you to become a racist which was actually one of the common outcomes among those who embraced Darwin’s theory.

But to be clear, evolution is not quite a CREATION theory per se – it is a development theory. It

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. James Tour in debate with Dr. Josh Swamidass, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJgr38h\\_3H0&t=1667s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJgr38h_3H0&t=1667s)

<sup>6</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), “science”.

attempts to describe the various mutations and adaptations that allowed some species to survive and reproduce and gain ascendancy over other species – in essence, the story of evolution comes in DOWNSTREAM from the question of creation. Evolution looks at man in all his beauty, complexity and glory and hypothesizes that he emerged out of the dust SLOWLY, gradually and in stages.

And that is one possible theory.

And interestingly, many proponents of evolution over the years have been Christian believers. Meaning they did not see evolution – at least initially - as a challenge to the message of Christianity. Now to be clear Darwin was not a believer – but several of his colleagues and collaborators were. In fact Darwin’s closet collaborator, Harvard Professor and Botanist Asa Gray was a passionate Christian. He believed that what he was doing was discovering the process whereby God formed Adam out of the dust – and he believed that what Genesis was describing was in fact a longer process than many of us assume when we first read the text.

So evolution is a theory about how man emerged from the dust – but it is not a settled fact – it continues to be tested and adjusted and it is not universally affirmed within the scientific community. In 2001 over a thousand scientists signed a declaration called “A Scientific Dissent From Darwinism”<sup>7</sup>.

So it is a theory – but to be clear it has not falsified the claims of Christianity.

Christianity says that men and women are unique creatures and that they were created by God and endowed with particular dignity and glory. The Bible says that God created the heavens and the earth by DIVINE FIAT – by the power of his spoken Word – and that cannot be falsified because that moment lies beyond the scope of human inquiry. The Bible goes on to assert that God shaped and created mankind and personally lifted him up out of the dust – and that assertion LIKEWISE lies beyond the scope of human inquiry. No one was there to see it. The act itself was not repeated. And were you to meet the man on the very day of his creation and were you to apply all the best tools of scientific inquiry so as to surmise his age and history – nothing you would find in your

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<sup>7</sup> <https://dissentfromdarwin.org>

test tube would tell you the truth about his supernatural origin and dignity.

Such knowledge could only be attained by revelation from God.

You see science is a tool – a useful tool, a wonderful tool - but it does not have infinite reach and it cannot open every mystery to which it is often applied.

But having **BLOCKED** the over-reaching objections of science I think it would be helpful to point out as well that the supposed conflict between science and Christianity is greatly overblown in popular culture.

## **2. Parry (Are science and Christianity truly at war?)**

Much of this supposed conflict goes back to the discoveries of Galileo – or so the story goes. But the story as it is told today has little relationship with actual history. The story seems to be that Galileo was a courageous rebel who was wielding the sword of science against the intractable woodenness of institutional Christianity – but there are so many flaws with that narrative that it is hard to know where to begin. For one thing – Galileo was hardly a rebellious outsider – he was on the church payroll until the day he died. He was under house arrest for a time, but not for his views on science, he was on house arrest because he publicly attacked and ridiculed the pope. Galileo wrote that himself saying that the major cause of his detention was that he had made: “fun of His Holiness”<sup>8</sup>.

Galileo lived shortly after the age of Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church was in no mood to tolerate anti-papalism – that’s what got Galileo into trouble.

But people will say: “Didn’t Christians believe that the earth was flat before Copernicus and Galileo?”. But that’s not true either. Even in the time of Copernicus and Galileo, people had known that the earth was a sphere for over a thousand years. Let me provide a quote for you:

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<sup>8</sup> William R. Shea as cited in Lee Strobel, *The Case For A Creator*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 201.

“In the Middle Ages, you couldn’t emerge from any kind of education, cathedral school or university, without being perfectly clear about the earth’s sphericity and even its approximate circumference.”<sup>9</sup>

Galileo was a Christian like many of the most influential scientists over the ages. Isaac Newton, for example, actually wrote more books on theology than he did on physics. Lord Kelvin, from whom we get the Kelvin Unit of temperature said in a speech in 1883:

“I have long felt that there was a general impression in the non-scientific world, that the scientific world believes Science has discovered ways of explaining all the facts of nature without adopting any definite belief in a Creator. I have never doubted that that impression was utterly groundless.”<sup>10</sup>

Allan Rex Sandage has been called “The Old Man of Astronomy”. He was a student of Edwin Hubble. He won more scientific awards and honours than we have time to mention. He was an atheist at the start of his career but in 1985 at a scientific conference he told the world that he had become a Christian – not despite his science but because of it. He said:

“It was my science that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science.”<sup>11</sup>

And we could go on and on. There are a surprising number of outspoken Christians on the faculty of many of the most well-known scientific institutions in the world. MIT is literally crawling with Christian professors. We could mention nuclear science professor Ian Hutchinson, or professor of astronautics Daniel Hastings, or electrical engineering professor Jing Kong or artificial intelligence expert Rosalind Picard or Chemistry professor Troy Van Voorhis or biological and mechanical engineering professor Linda Griffith, or professor of Ocean engineering Dick Yue or chemical engineering professor Chris Love or professor of biology Doug Lauffenburger – and these are all professors from one university! So again, the idea that science has somehow falsified Christianity or that science is essentially at war with Christianity would be news to a great many Christian Scientists around the world.

It is simply not true – and it can’t be true because such attainments are beyond the proper reach

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<sup>9</sup> David Lindberg as cited in Lee Strobel, *The Case For A Creator*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 202.

<sup>10</sup> Lord Kelvin as cited in in Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 115.

<sup>11</sup> Allan Rex Sandage as cited in Newsweek magazine.

and legitimate purview of actual science.

David Berlinski is an agnostic scientist who understands the limits of his particular discipline. He says:

“While science has nothing of value to say on the great and aching questions of life, death, love, and meaning, what the religious traditions of mankind have said forms a coherent body of thought. The yearnings of the human soul are not in vain. There is a system of belief adequate to the complexity of experience. There is recompense for suffering. A principle beyond selfishness is at work in the cosmos ... I do not know whether any of this is true. I am certain that the scientific community does not know that it is false.”<sup>12</sup>

And that really is all that we as Christians need to establish. We don't need to FALSIFY any particular scientific claims – we simply need to remind our friends and loved ones what science can and cannot speak to. Science can tell us nothing about God. God exists beyond the reach of science. And science can tell us nothing about who we really are as human beings. Science can tell us how fast we will travel if we jump off a high building, it can tell us what temperature we will likely freeze at if we spend the night outside, science can help us build a better mouse trap and it can even take us to the moon.

And those things are all very helpful – but they aren't actually the main things that Christianity is interested in – and they aren't actually the main things that most people are interested in – at least in an ultimate sense.

And so that leads us into our counterstroke.

And that's what this whole journey has been about – we want to STOP the overreach of scientific objection – we want to point out that science is good and helpful and should in no way be seen as the enemy of Christianity – and then we want to get back to our business. And our business is commending Christ. And so here is where I think you want to bring this conversation in for a landing.

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<sup>12</sup> David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism And Its Scientific Pretensions*, (New York: Basic Books, 2009), xvi.

I think you want to ask your friend – who are you going to trust to tell you the truth about those realities that lie BEYOND what your eyes can see?

### **3. Thrust (Who do you trust to tell you about realities beyond what your eyes can see?)**

If they are willing to go there with you, I recommend you take them to John 3:11-15. This is the account of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus – one of the religious leaders of the day.

Nicodemus was having a hard time tracking with everything that Jesus was saying.

“How can these things be?” (John 3:9 ESV), he asked Jesus. And Jesus replied:

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:11–15 ESV)

At the very centre of this passage is the assertion by Jesus that he has unique authority to speak about heavenly things – because he is the only One to ever descend from heaven in order to speak with men and women about such things.

It appears that he is quoting from or at least alluding to Proverbs 30:4. Proverbs 30 is a chapter ascribed to Agur Son of Jakeh – meaning that this was something that Solomon inserted into the collection of wise sayings that he and his wife prepared for their young adult son – kind of like an appendix as it were. It is in a lot of ways very similar to Job 28 which Pastor Jody arranged for us earlier in the service. It is a chapter exploring how difficult it is to arrive at REAL KNOWLEDGE in this life. After all we are fallen creatures – we live down here – our lives are so brief - we are apart from God and therefore there is so much reality and so much TRUTH that we simply cannot see – so how can anyone really know anything Agur asks? The verse that Jesus alludes to is Proverbs 30:4 which reads as follows:

Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know!

(Proverbs 30:4 ESV)

Now in John 3 Jesus had just been talking to Nicodemus about the water of life and the wind of the Spirit – those were the things that Nicodemus didn't understand. In John 3 verses 5-8 Jesus was saying:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God... The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:5–8 ESV)

Are you seeing that? By stepping into this Proverb Jesus is saying: I am the One who can ascend and descend from heaven. I am the One who came down and I am the One who will go back. I am the One who hovers over the waters of life and who controls the wind of the Spirit. I am the One who speaks and dead things come to life! I am God – even the Son of God – and you should listen to me!

Nobody else made the kind of claims that Jesus made.

Mohammed said that he had a dream in a cave – his wife at the time thought he was possessed by a demon. But Mohammed never said: I came down from heaven and when I'm done talking I'll go back up into heaven.”

He never said that.

Only Jesus could dare to say that.

So again the question becomes – granted that science can only tell us so much – and given that there is so much more that we need to know – who are you going to trust to tell you those things? Who are going to trust to speak to you about the things of life, death, eternity and heaven?

I commend to you my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I believe that he is the Word of God in the flesh – in fact I think that’s one of the reasons he quoted from Proverbs 30:4. Do you know what the next verse is in Proverbs 30? Verse 5 of Proverbs 30 says this:

“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”  
(Proverbs 30:5 ESV)

You hearing that? Solomon wanted his son to know that earthly wisdom could only take you so far. For the things that really matter you need to trust the Word of God and you need take shelter in what he provides for your salvation.

And Jesus in John 3 says – that’s me.

I am the Word of God.

I am the One who came down from heaven.

And I am the One who will be lifted up from the earth for your salvation.

Blessed are all those who take refuge in me.

So – it all comes back to Jesus. No matter how much or how little science you know – it all comes down to this: What did you do with Jesus?

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.<sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.<sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:16–21 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

According to the Bible what you do with Jesus tells the truth about who you are at heart. If you love the darkness – if you want to do wicked things – then you will not come. You will not look. You will not see. You will hide behind your various shields and defenses and you will perish in your sin.

But if you are ready today to confess your sin – to lay down your arms and to give up your rebellion and to return to your intended loyalty and allegiance – then all you need to do is look. All you need to do is look. Look upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus and be saved.

As the Israelites looked upon the serpent in the wilderness raised up on a pole for their atonement – so you now can look with the eyes of faith upon the body of Jesus Christ upon the cross. You can see him there as an expression of God's just wrath upon your sin. You can see him there as a demonstration of God's love for you, a sinner.

And you can receive that.

And you can be born again.

Science can tell you nothing about that life. This is something you have to come to by way of revelation. This is something you have to receive as a gift of the Spirit.

So come.

The Spirit and the Bride say come.

Come unto Jesus and be saved.

Thanks be to God. Let me pray for us.

Amen. Pastor Jody, will you come and lead us?