

# Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?

## Psalm 19:1-6, Psalm 8:1-6

**Series:** Confronting Christianity – Summer 2021

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**Key Sentence:** Science still declares God's glory to those who will see it.

**Outline:**

I. Science points us to God (Psalm 19:1-6)

II. Only God can give meaning (Psalm 8:1-6)

**Psalm 19:1–6** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. <sup>2</sup>Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup>Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup>which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. <sup>6</sup>Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

**Psalm 8:1–6** O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. <sup>2</sup>Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. <sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? <sup>5</sup>Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.

## Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity? Psalm 19:1-4, Psalm 8:1-6

Chapter 7 of *Confronting Christianity* begins like this: “In the opening pages of *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, philosopher Alex Rosenberg declares: ‘There’s so much more to atheism than its knockdown arguments that there is no God. There is the whole rest of the worldview that comes along with atheism. It’s a demanding, rigorous, breathtaking grip on reality, one that has been vindicated beyond reasonable doubt. It’s called science.’ Other atheists pile on. Steven Pinker states the negative case: ‘The findings of science imply that the belief systems of all the world’s traditional religions and cultures . . . are factually mistaken.’ Richard Dawkins sees a universe that ‘has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.’ Listening to New Atheists waxing lyrical, one might think that the case for theism is closed.

But there are other voices. Rebecca McLaughlin has a multitude of them in this chapter, people who tell us that science has by no means ruled out God, but that God is, in fact, the best explanation for science. But I want to begin with a voice older than all of these, the voice of David, king of Judah a thousand years before Christ. David will tell us how creation declares the glory of God, and that’s the big idea for our time today, that science still declares God’s glory to those who will see it. Psalm 19:1-6 *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. <sup>2</sup>Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup>Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup>which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. <sup>6</sup>Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

“The heavens declare the glory of God.” God’s intention in creation was that people look up into the night skies and see that this is the handiwork of an omniscient and omnipotent God. God’s glory is the visible display of his perfections, and the night sky, even the daytime sky, is the visible display of his complete power, matchless wisdom and infinite sense of beauty. “The sky above proclaims he handwork.” This reminds us of Romans 1, which we studied a few weeks ago. Romans 1:20 “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

The heavens, and all of creation, are intended to be a wordless witness to the power and wisdom of God. Here's verse 2 from the NET Bible translation "Day after day it [creation] speaks out; night after night it reveals his greatness." If the heavens or all of creation were static, it would still speak of God's greatness and wisdom. But the fact of motion and cycles and repetition and seasons and even day and night points to the reality of design, of a method behind what we see. In a very real sense all these things are a wordless witness to science because the heavens and all of creation point wordlessly to order – things happen according to a plan or system – and to complexity – that system is not always obvious without careful and even scientific observation.

Wordlessness is a key focus of these verses. You might be confused by verses 3 and 4 in the English Standard Version which we normally use, but the NET Bible makes the meaning plain: "There is no actual speech or word, nor is its voice literally heard. <sup>4</sup>Yet its voice echoes throughout the earth; its words carry to the distant horizon." The voice of creation, a witness without words, pervades the universe, and so often it is science that reveals the wonders of creation, and makes this voice heard. This is one of the reasons you often see the phrase 'believe the science,' as if 'the science' was a person speaking. Science, understood correctly, does have a wordless voice. It speaks of the creator.

The example the Psalmist gives is the movement and power of the sun. "In them [in the heavens] he has set a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup>which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. <sup>6</sup>Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat." Here the sun is metaphorically compared to a "bridegroom" and a "strong man." The joy of the bridegroom, coming from the wedding canopy or the bridal chamber, represents the radiance of the sun. The strong man, or champion, rejoicing in his strength as he sets out to run his course, represents the power of the sun, as it seems to move through "its circuit." From our earthly perspective the sun "rises" and "makes its circuit" with radiance and vigor, so that it warms the earth. The sun reveals God's glory, power, and wisdom. One does not have to listen for words, because the effect of the sun is evident: "nothing is hidden from its heat."

The point is that science, as the study of creation, still declares God's glory to those who will listen. It may be voiceless, and so some will miss it, but for those with ears to hear, it speaks loudly. That's been the case for many throughout the history of science. Rebecca McLaughlin names many scientists who have felt that far from driving them toward atheism, science has reinforced their belief and thus their scientific study has been done in order to glorify God.

Let me share a couple of these. The originators of the scientific method were people of faith. Two Franciscan friars, Roger Bacon and William of Ockham, who lived around 1300 AD, laid the theoretical foundations for the scientific method. Francis Bacon, who lived around 1600 AD established and popularized it. In his essay “Of Atheism,” he wrote, “It is true, that a little philosophy [or science] inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.” Many scientists have seen “an intrinsic connection between the theistic world view and the scientific one.” Philosopher of science Hans Halvorson says “the first scientists believed our universe was designed and created by God ‘according to a blueprint that can be discerned by rational creatures like ourselves.’”

Copernicus believed this. We’ve talked before about the Copernican revolution, which placed the sun at the center so the earth and other planets revolve around the sun. Copernicus did not formulate this understanding as an atheist wanting to dethrone theology. In fact a sun-centered planetary system did not dethrone Biblical teaching at all, but Aristotle, whose ideas had been adopted by the church. Copernicus said Aristotle’s ideas were “no sure scheme for the movements of the machinery of the world which has been built for us by the Best and Most Orderly Workman of all.” His loving duty, he said, was “to seek the truth in all things, in so far as God has granted that to human reason.”

Science still declares God’s glory to those who will see it. In the brief history of science many of its leading practitioners have believed in God and pursued science in his service. McLaughlin describes the contributions of scientists like Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell and Lord Kelvin. Newton was one of the most influential scientists of all time, famous for formulating the laws of gravity and motion. While not an orthodox Christian, due to his denial of the full divinity of Christ, Newton was an earnest believer in God and wrote more about theology than physics. Faraday is best known for his work on electromagnetism, and his scientific contributions were so significant he is considered one of the greatest experimental scientists ever. The Faraday constant is named after him, the Faraday effect, the Faraday cage. He was a passionate Christian, deeply interested in the relationship between science and faith. Maxwell has been credited with the second great unification of physics, bringing together electricity, magnetism, and light. He was an evangelical Presbyterian, who became an elder of the Church of Scotland. Lord Kelvin whose name is memorialized in the Kelvin unit of temperature, is another example of scientific excellence and serious faith. In a speech to the Christian Evidence Society, of which he was president, he declared:

“I have long felt that there was a general impression in the non-scientific world, that 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.” The point is for many scientists in the last centuries, there was no conflict between science and faith. Science did not drive them from faith, but in many cases reinforced it.

But, as McLaughlin says, what about Christians today who are scientists. “If the history of science from the sixteenth to the twentieth century gives us multiple examples of leading Christian scientists, have scientists come to their atheistic senses in the cool light of the twenty-first century?” “I live a short walk from MIT, the sacred temple of scientific endeavor in the United States. Stop a student and ask if he or she thinks there are any Christian professors at the Institute, and the answer will likely be no. Yet the roll call of Christian professors at MIT is impressive. Professor Daniel Hastings began following Jesus as a teenager in the United Kingdom: “I start by saying that there is a God who created the universe,” Hastings states, “and he is not an impersonal God.” Professor Jing Kong, who grew up in China and became a Christian when she was a grad student at the University of California, Berkeley, declares: “[My] research is only a platform for me to do God’s work. His creation, the way he made this world, is very interesting. It’s amazing, really.” Artificial intelligence expert Rosalind Picard, who invented the field of affective computing, became a Christian when she was a teenager. Chemistry professor Troy Van Voorhis came to Christ when he was a grad student at Berkeley. Biological and mechanical engineering professor Linda Griffith became a Christian when she was already an established scientist. Other Christians include professor of mechanical and ocean engineering Dick K P Yue; chemical engineering professor Chris Love; professor of biological engineering, chemical engineering, and biology Doug Lauffenburger; history professor Anne McCants; and even neuroscientist and former MIT president (the first female president of the Institute) Susan Hockfield.

That’s just at MIT. There are countless scientists around the world who unabashedly hold the Christian faith. “If science has disproved Christianity, no one has thought to notify them!” McLaughlin concludes with the story of Francis Collins who led the Human Genome Project and now directs the National Institutes of Health. He grew up in a secular home. Religion wasn’t so much attacked as it was irrelevant. As a graduate student at Yale, he shifted from agnosticism to atheism, assuming that belief in God was rationally untenable. But his atheism was challenged during his time as a junior doctor, when the faith of his patients seemed to give them enviable help in the face of suffering.

Collins was particularly shaken by one conversation with an older woman suffering from untreatable pain, who shared her faith in Jesus and asked, “Doctor, what do you believe?” “I felt my face flush,” he recalls, “as I stammered out the words, ‘I’m not really sure.’” In his discomfort, Collins realized he had never considered the evidence for God. This patient’s question set him on a journey of exploration and research that ended in him accepting Jesus as his Savior. He now believes “The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome.”

That’s really the first point. From the time of David to the present day there have been many, many people who have recognized that science, and the creation that conforms to scientific principles points to God. There have also been many who have denied this, just as there have been many who have denied the existence of God altogether. But the larger question is whether science can even be the arbiter or decider of meaning. Is science big enough to fill those shoes, to tell the world “O, theism is true,” or “O, atheism is true.” While Rebecca McLaughlin doesn’t put it in quite these words, the second half of her chapter is really devoted to answering this question.

Scripture also speaks to this question, the question of meaning and the role of science. Our second text for today is Psalm 8 verse 1 to 6 *O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. <sup>2</sup>Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. <sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? <sup>5</sup>Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.*

In this Psalm we worship the God of creation, but we worship him as greater than creation. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” When Scripture highlights or describes someone’s name, it is talking about the character, the identity, the nature of the one described. The Psalmist is saying “O Lord, how majestically is your character revealed in all the earth!” The one with this majestic name, nature and character is sovereign over all the earth. The remainder of verse 1 says “You have set your glory above the heavens.” God’s glory is greater than all that he has made: it is above the heavens, which are above the earth. The word ‘heavens’ in Scripture can mean the place where God is, but it can also mean the sky and all that is in it – sun, moon, stars, planets. That’s what the Psalmist means here – that God is greater than all he has created.

Verse 2 reminds us that the heavens declare God's glory, as a witness to all men. No one looks honestly at that witness without seeing the reality of a creator God. God's enemies, his foes, the scoffers, deny God and don't see it. Yet the children and infants who are less sophisticated, less jaded by the thinking of the world, look at the glory of God and give him praise.

Verses 3 and 4 remind us of Psalm 19, the witness of God in creation. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" The Psalmist isn't questioning whether God cares for man, as Carl Sagan or Richard Dawson do. He is not asking 'whether' but 'why?' Why would a God whose majesty extends beyond the ends of the universe and whose power allowed him to create it all at his word pay attention to a speck of dust? This is the question of significance, of meaning, the question that science can't answer. When scientists try to make science do this, their answers have holes in them the size of the space between the stars.

What is the meaning of humanity? What is the significance of the human race? The Psalmist gives the answer that God first revealed in Genesis: "Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet." Unlike the stuff of creation itself, unlike the plants or even the animals, man was made uniquely, in many ways, to be like God. For example, man has an ability to think and reason that reflects God's abilities more than any creature. Also, people can communicate, using words, images, sounds and sights to convey deep levels of truth and feeling. More than that, people have been made use those thinking and communicating abilities to be personal and relational beings, needing each other and being born into essential relationships with each other. In this we reflect the image of a God who from eternity past was triune, one God but three persons in vital communication and essential relationship with each other.

We are made in God's image. The Psalmist depicts this as being made little lower than the angels or "heavenly beings." That word is the plural word for God. It can refer to the angels of heaven, or to the triune God himself. This is the answer the Bible gives to the question of significance. We do feel awed and daunted by the enormity of creation, by the complexity of creation, by the power contained in the atom or the supernova, but all of that does not diminish the significance of being made in God's image, alone in creation with the ability to think, create and relate to our maker with obedience and love.

This is the meaning of creation, which science can't discover. It can't find God above the heavens because it is tied to a naturalistic world view. Science must see human beings as purely physical, biological, natural. McLaughlin points to an episode of the TV series *House*, where Dr. House accuses someone of having just figured out that they are "a bag of cells and waste with an expiration date." That's the naturalistic world view. In contrast McLaughlin says "Eight years ago, I gave birth to my first child. Her conception was not miraculous. Her gestation was unremarkable. Had a scientist studied it, there would be no gaps in the naturalistic script. Yet there was no doubt in my mind that this baby had been made by God, and that she was far more than a bag of cells and waste with an expiration date." "Indeed," she says, "the Bible describes us in even less flattering terms than does Dr. House. 'You are dust,' declares God to the first man, 'and to dust you shall return.' My daughter is dust. But she is not just dust. The Bible insists that our dust-formed selves have immense and inalienable value, because we are dust that has been fashioned by God and called to relationship with him. For Christians, therefore, the most important question is not *What does science say we are?* but *Who does God say we are?*" *What does life mean? How do we relate to God and to each other?*

These are questions science cannot answer. Indeed, the opponents of Christianity seek ways to cancel these questions. Darwinian evolution, for example, strips all meaning out of human existence. This is evident even to atheist Richard Dawkins, who describes himself as a passionate Darwinian when it comes to science but "a passionate anti-Darwinian when it comes to politics and how we should conduct human affairs." Dawkins does not want to extend complete meaninglessness to all moral and ethical questions. He says "evolution gave us a brain whose size increased to the point where it became capable of understanding its own provenance [that is, it came from the survival of the fittest], and of deploring the moral implications and fighting against them." But within a materialist worldview that rejects any supernatural storyline, there is no reason to think the moral implications of evolution are to be deplored, or even that there are such things as moral implications. Using evolution to blast theism leaves the secular humanist stunned by the kickback.

Reflecting on the difference between an atheistic approach to science and a Christian one, Stanford neuroscientist Bill Newsome poses this question: "Do we live in a universe where our highest values and intuitions about ethical behavior are in touch with the central reality of the universe and the reason the universe was built from the beginning? Or are our highest values and ethical intuitions kind of a joke—an accident—that really have nothing to do with what the universe is about?" If life is to have significance, science can't provide it.

The thing I find great about this whole evolution debate is how little evolution can actually explain. Not just meaning, which is the big one, but also complexity. The more science looks into the cell, the basic building block of life, and into the genome, and into the basic biochemistry of life, the more they find the unlikeliness that chance and time could put these things together. Books like “Darwin’s Black Box,” and “Signature in the Cell,” and others develop this argument. Take DNA for example. Medline.com, a secular source, says “Only about 1 percent of DNA is made up of protein-coding genes; the other 99 percent is noncoding. Noncoding DNA does not provide instructions for making proteins. Scientists once thought noncoding DNA was “junk,” with no known purpose. However, it is becoming clear that at least some of it is integral to the function of cells, particularly the control of gene activity.” Notice the phrase “integral to the function of cells. This means that evolution is not just postulating the chance creation of the small percentage of DNA that clearly creates amino acids and ultimately proteins, but the simultaneous chance creation of the non-coding segments of the DNA that are nonetheless central to the operation of the cell. The more life science you do, the more you stand in awe of the complexity of God’s design. That’s the way God intended science to work, not as a faith killer but as a faith builder.

There are so many more ways that science points to God. McLaughlin says “If we raise our gaze from humanity to the universe at large, we find another set of interesting questions broached by contemporary science. The evidence that our universe is minutely fine-tuned for life raises some challenging questions for atheists today. Cosmologists have isolated key numbers describing forces and relationships fundamental to the physical universe. Cambridge professor and astronomer Martin Rees explained in his book *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* that if any of these numbers were even fractionally different, there would be no stars, no earth, and no life. Could this have happened by pure chance? Rees admits it is incredibly unlikely.

Science can lead us to see more clearly the glory of a creator God. But science can’t answer the question of significance. Only Scripture can. God created the universe and placed in it humanity, made in his image. He gave humanity a mandate to go forth and steward creation by thinking, by creating, by relating, both to one another and to God. But humanity blew it, and sold our God given significance for the bite of a tasty fruit and the pride of independence. Only because God loved us and valued do we continue to have any meaning, which now comes because God showed his love to us in Jesus. He died to pay the price of our rebellion and sin. He rose victorious over sin and death, and he renews, restores and gives meaning to all those who will put their trust in him.

Scripture says “some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” Some trust in science, some in evolution, but we trust in the name of the Lord our awesome creator and Savior.