

**Tough Questions:
Helping thinkers believe, and believers think.**

Part 2: Has science disproved Christianity?

(Written by Terran Williams, Common Ground Church)

Two video excerpts were used throughout the talk. You can download and view the whole videos – and then view select excerpts of them (times shown in this document)

Keller video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kxup3OS5ZhQ

Collins video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=32UGgy-P0yU

Tip: go to www.keepvid.com, paste a website address and it will let you download it.

Intro: We're dealing with a common question that undermines belief in God in general, and belief in Christianity in particular. It is this: 'Hasn't science disproved Christianity.'

It's a massive subject. By way of introduction, in this presentation we will listen for about 27 minutes in total to some contributions by two great thinkers....

The one is the world-renown scientist, Dr Francis Collins who headed up the human genome project, the project that deciphered the DNA of the human being. He is a brilliant man, and he is also a believer. The Veritas Forum have kindly let us use excerpts from a talk he did – called *The Language Of God* - at the California Institute of Technology, a large audience of predominantly non-Christians.

The other thinker is Dr Tim Keller, who leads one of the largest churches in Manhattan. His New York Times bestselling book, 'The Reason for God' earned him such respect that Google's Headquarters invited him to address their staff on the subject. We will see excerpts from that talk – as he addresses some of the brightest young minds in America.

In fact, if this talk interests you – I commend their books as a next step in exploration. Francis Collin's book: 'The Language Of God: a scientist presents evidence for God' and Tim Keller's 'The Reason for God: belief in an age of skepticism'. They make for fascinating reading.

Let's dive in. Word is out that really intelligent people don't believe in God.

Well that's at least the impression made by a spate of new books by the so-called New Athiests – men such as Daniel Bennet, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris.

Truth be told, atheists are only 5% of the population – it's just that society has – for whatever reason - handed the coveted microphone to them. That's why this group carries more weight in our culture than their small numbers warrant.

But the claim has been made: to believe in God is stupid. Bill Maher has said, '*I think faith in God is a neurological disorder*'. And Sam Harris concurs: '*It is difficult to imagine a set of beliefs more suggestive of mental illness than those that lie at the heart of many of our religious traditions*'.

Broadly speaking, there are two main models for dealing with the relationship between science and faith. The one model is faith and science as enemies. That's how the New Atheists cast the argument – and many times in history Christians have done the same. I think of the church persecuting Galileo for his claim that the earth orbited around the sun. The other model is faith and science as friends – each one throwing light on the other. That's how Collins sees it...

[Collins' Video: go to 44:28-48:08](#)

So it's a rational position to say that science and faith can be friends - friends that bring out the best in each other.

But the New Atheists promote another major perspective. They argue that belief in God is not just unscientific. They also argue that belief in God is evil, and that it leads to violence – and therefore must be eliminated from the modern age...

Listen to Tim Keller deal with this claim in two ways...

[Keller's video: go to 5:01-5L47 and go to 17:17-20:28](#)

One of my personal concerns with the new atheists is their claim that bringing up your children in the faith is a form of child abuse. For example, Dawkins writes:

'We should no more allow parents to teach their children to believe in the Bible than we should allow parents to knock their teeth out or lock them in a dungeon.'
'It's one thing to say that people should believe whatever they like, but should they be free to impose their beliefs on the children? Is there something to be said for society stepping in?'

Can you see what he's saying? It is wrong, even evil, to influence the beliefs of others, even your own kids. But then he does the very thing he condemns. He's in effect saying 'How dare you teach religion to your kids – rather let society teach them atheism. It's better for them.' Now, it's this kind of ugliness – even arrogance - that caused many philosopher-atheists, such as Michael Ruse to say, *'The God Delusion makes me ashamed to be an atheist'*.

Besides I'm not so sure that faith in God always needs to be taught to kids. Plenty of research shows that for many children faith in a God is intuitive. For example, Sophia Cataletty', a researcher who has pioneered the study of spirituality in young children speaks of how often their spiritual perceptions exceed what they have ever been taught. For example, she speaks of a 3 year old brought up in a strictly atheistic home – who from the youngest was told there is no God. At 3 she asks again, 'Where did the world come from?' Dad answers as he always does about there being no God – and explains this in scientific naturalistic terms, but then adds, 'There are some people however who believe that a powerful being made the world.' She starts to dance around, saying, 'I knew what you told me wasn't true! It's him. It's him.' Fascinating stuff! 1

Now, let's explore the rationality of belief in God. Did you know there are rational reasons for belief in God – not laboratory-style proofs, but evidences that are big enough to make it rational to believe. Listen to Collins in 15 minutes detailing some of this evidence...

[Collins' video: go to 15:23-32:38](#)

See that? Many people, having honestly looked at some of these evidences have started to believe in God. One example is Antony Flew. Right now, Dawkins is the world's most famous atheist. But before him, for more than half a century, Flew was the most noted atheist in the world ... until he shocked the intellectual world in 2004 by publicly announcing that he had changed his mind and now professed faith in a Creator. As a philosopher, Flew was always prepared to go wherever the evidence led him, which toward the end of his life led him to argue that atheism is not logical. He ended up writing a book, 'There is a God' – showing how the evidence made it far more likely that there is a Creator than that there isn't one.

So far, we've made the argument that belief in God is not incompatible with science. But what about belief in the Bible? Hasn't science disproved the Bible? Well many skeptics say that science has disproved the Bible on two fronts: evolution and miracles.

Let's talk about evolution first. Tim Keller tells of a young scientist who said to him, 'As a believer in evolution, I can't accept the Bible's prescientific accounts of the origin of life. And that's why I can't accept Christianity.'

Genesis 1 tells of how God who creates the world as we find it in its present form in 6 days. Day 1: he creates light. Day 2: the atmosphere. Day 3: the continents and the sea – as well as vegetation. Day 4: the stars, the moon, the sun. Day 5: the fish and the birds. Day 6: animals and humans.

What do we do with this opening chapter? Do we take it completely literally? – and how they reconcile to science?

I've got to be honest and say that Bible-believing Christians are divided on the answer. Let me refer to three websites that explore the three main views...

1. The first view is that of www.answersingenesis.org. They believe that Genesis 1 and 2 should all be taken absolutely literally. And that wherever science suggests anything that contradicts the literal reading of Scripture – it is science that should be challenged. These are the 6-day creationists. They argue that evolution is definitely not true – that God created human beings more or less as you now find them.
2. The second view is that of www.godandscience.org. They believe it should be taken literally, but argue that the Hebrew word 'day' is 'yom' which can also be translated 'epoch' or 'period of time.' They argue that over 6 epochs of time, God created the world in its present form. Evolution doesn't fit easily with this view either. People in this camp remind us that evolution is at best a theory, a theory fraught with as-of-yet unsolved problems.

3. The third view is that of www.biologos.org. They argue that Genesis 1 and 2 are indeed trusted Scripture, but that they should not be taken in an overly literal way. They argue that the Bible consists of many types of genre – some parts very factual and historical, and other parts very figurative and poetic. They argue that you wouldn't read a love poem in the same way you'd read a science textbook, so – in the same way - you should not read Genesis 1 and 2 as a scientific treatise. They argue that Genesis 1 and 2 is a unique combination of both historical and figurative elements. This part of Scripture – though teaching good theology – is more poetry than it is hard history and science. For this reason, they are open to the possibility of evolution – which they see as a mechanism built into his creation that has brought about over time the life forms we have today. (For additional understanding of this interpretation of Genesis 1-2 go to www.commonground.co.za and click on 'Tough Qs' and then 'Evolution and Genesis') Collins, by the way, fits into that third category.

So there are three main views about how evolution and the Bible fit together. The church I'm part of – Common Ground Church – see this as a non-major and negotiable issue. In other words, even on our leadership team we are permitted different views with regard to HOW God created complex and diverse life-forms.

That said, we're all united by the clear biblical teaching THAT God created everything. It's all the result of God's creativity and genius. This world is indeed God's art gallery – and every thing there is, whether whale or child, waterfall or willow, sunrise or sunset, mountain or molehill, muon or gluon – all of it should lead us to say, 'Wow, God, you made this. You are amazing!'

Now, let's talk about miracles...

The Bible is full of miracles. And many people – in a skeptical age – say, 'I don't believe in miracles. And since the Bible is full of miracles, it can't be true.' Of course this is an example of circular reasoning.

Let me briefly deal with the 3 most commonly scoffed miracles in the Bible...

One commonly sneered at miracle is the massive flood in Noah's time. Genesis 6-9 tells the story of how God prophesied - then brought about - 'the whole world' being flooded, with Noah and his family and many animals being spared as they floated on their ark, until their ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

There are two views that Bible-believers hold: View One says that the whole world was indeed flooded. The evidence for this is that almost every ancient civilization tells of a massive flood that once happened. View Two – which is my view – is that just Noah's part of the world flooded. When Noah says 'the whole world' flooded he is speaking from his perspective, not God's. The whole world *as he knew it* was flooded.

Is there any geological evidence of a colossal flood in the region where Noah lived? Well, there is one fascinating possibility. In 1996 it was discovered that the massive Black Sea – with a surface area of close on half a million squared kilometers - was once a fertile valley inhabited by multitudes.

Then in about 5600 BC (which may likely be the timing of Noah's life) there was a massive world-wide glacial melt, and the rapidly-rising ocean cataclysmically spilled over into this deep region – causing the decimation of untold people and animals. Also interesting is that the mountains of Ararat, where the boat eventually grounded itself, is right there by the Black Sea.

Another often-mocked miracle is Jesus' virgin birth. And indeed it is absolutely impossible for a woman to conceive a child without a male's sperm. Here are 3 perspectives that may soften your incredulity: 1. You're not the only person who struggles to believe it happened. In fact Mary's fiancé, Joseph didn't believe her either. He wanted to split up. It was only when he encountered an angel who verified Mary's account that he believed. 2. It was not an arbitrary miracle. 700 before, Isaiah the prophet had prophesied that one day a child would be born of a virgin, and he would be called 'Immanuel' which means 'God with us.' The virgin birth was part of God's plan. 3. If you assume there is no God, then you must dismiss the story as fiction. But if you assume there is a God, you must concede that creating a baby in a woman's womb would be child's play.

A third miracle that is often scorned as ridiculous is Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Now the resurrection of Jesus is central to the credibility of Christianity. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then I'd encourage every Christian to abandon faith in Christ. It's a fake. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then I'd encourage every non-Christian to embrace faith in Christ. It's real!

Now, the evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus is massive indeed – there are at least 8 compelling evidences, but I will mention just one: *There were plenty of eye-witnesses!* In fact at least 550 people in total witnessed Jesus alive again – on over 11 different occasions. That is a lot of witnesses! Which is why – when the apostle Paul writes 1 Corinthians some 15 years after Jesus' resurrection – he in effect says, 'Go ask these eye-witnesses yourselves. They are still alive. We're not making this stuff up.'

All that to say, it's not irrational to believe that these – and other - miracles have happened – especially when you are open to the possibility that there is a God.

Okay, let me come in for a landing...

If you don't believe in a Creator, would you not at least be open to the possibility – even strong possibility – that there is one? You will never have laboratory proof that God exists, nor that he doesn't. Not believing is itself a step of faith. We're all believers. You might say, 'I have too many doubts.' Well, that might be because you're by nature or training a skeptical person. Here's an idea: why don't you do what you're good at – and *doubt your doubts, be skeptical about your skepticism?* ☺ Just an idea.

But perhaps you do believe in a Creator, but you don't believe in Christ. Well, any chance you could look into it some more – like Collins and Keller have done? On that note, let's listen to Collins share his journey of moving from belief in a Creator to faith in Christ...

Collins' video: go to 32:25- 36:26

So, faith in a Creator – and for that matter faith in Christ – does not require intellectual suicide. It is based upon reason and evidence. But – though faith is certainly based on some evidence – it goes beyond mere rational assent. It requires personal commitment, which then – as I have seen in my experience - grows in its vitality and depth as God makes himself more and more real to you. Collins in his book tells of the moment he finally made that faith-commitment...

'I had to make a choice. A full year had passed since I decided to believe in some sort of God. Then, on a beautiful fall day, as I was hiking in the Cascade Mountains, the majesty and beauty of God's creation overwhelmed my resistance. As I rounded a corner and saw a beautiful and unexpected frozen waterfall, hundreds of feet high, I knew the search was over. The next morning, I knelt in the dewy grass as the sun rose and surrendered to Jesus Christ.'

Thanks for listening and don't forget to get hold of those 2 books:

Collins' 'The language of God' <http://www.amazon.com/Reason-God-Belief-Age-Skepticism/dp/0525950494>

Keller's 'The reason for God.' www.amazon.com/Reason-God-Belief-Age-Skepticism/dp/0525950494