

6. TAKE-HOME POINTS

As we draw our study to a close, we can look back on all the ground we have covered. We started by building a framework in which to analyze these issues and proposing some principles to guide us on our journey. We reviewed the history of the relationship between science and Christian faith, including the unfortunate and relatively recent development of “warfare.” We talked about how to read Genesis, with an eye on its original context. We talked about developing a Biblical theology of nature, one that recognizes that nature is not in competition with God. Last but not least, we talked about that (unnecessarily) divisive word – evolution.

This material was originally developed in a classroom setting, where it is common to close with “take-home points.” That is not a bad strategy for written material either; especially in an area like this where I think the church would be much healthier if we could merely grasp a few simple concepts. So, if your memory only has room for three things from this course, here are the three most important things to remember:

1. Complementarity, not warfare. Since God is the source of both nature and Scripture, any apparent conflict between the two must not be real, but rather the result of some flawed human interpretation. Rejecting a “warfare” perspective, we should recognize that science and Christian theology offer complementary perspectives on God’s reality, like pictures taken from different angles. Unfortunately, extremists on both the science side and the Christian side promote harmful warfare between the two. Ironically, these opponents share common ground in that they both make foundational assumptions that are contrary to sound Christian theology. If we can recognize and reject these bad assumptions, if we can get our fellow Christians (including our children) to stay away from these bad assumptions, and if we can get those outside the church to see that what they’re assuming about Christianity is mistaken, most of our problems in this area will vanish. The bad assumptions shared by the warring extremes are the subject of our next two points.
2. The Bible is not a science textbook. Those who use science to attack Christianity are usually attacking fundamentalist readings of the Bible (which are easy targets), and to the extent the church takes that approach to Scripture, insisting that it give answers to scientific questions that the inspired writers weren’t trying to answer, we are digging our own graves in terms of defending the faith. We need to read it in context, including its cultural and historical context, with its purpose and message in mind. We need to allow God to communicate in an incarnational way, at times using figurative language or accommodating parts of the message to the limited capacities of the audience, rather than forcing God’s word to conform to the human-invented standards of modern Western rationalism.
3. God is sovereign over nature. Natural explanations are not rivals to God (the “God of the Gaps” error); they are descriptions of the tools God uses. A “natural” explanation for something, whether it be rain or the evolution of life, should not be a threat to our faith, and anyone (whether atheist or misguided Christian) who claims such explanations mean God is absent is making a philosophical error. When science finds a natural explanation for something, we should not lament or resist it as though the science diminishes God. Instead, we should praise God for allowing us to see into his magnificent and subtle ways of working in creation.