

PREFACE

I wish there were no need for this course. I'm convinced that if the church would just avoid a few simple mistakes, most of our so-called conflicts between science and Christian faith would disappear, and we could focus on more important aspects of following Jesus. Yet, these issues continue to cause problems, fed by mistakes and misunderstandings both within and without the church, and the cause of the Gospel suffers as a result.

As I have pondered and studied these matters over the past 15 years or so, I have become convinced that most of our problems in this area don't come from lack of scientific knowledge. Instead, our problems are primarily theological – both unhealthy ways of reading and interpreting Scripture and inadequate understanding of God's relationship to nature. Therefore, the science content in this course will be minimal (which may be a relief to some), and no science background on the part of the reader is assumed or required.

Another thing I have observed is that too often people rush headlong into arguments about controversial issues (evolution, the length of creation “days”, etc.) without first developing a Biblical and theological foundation to put these controversies in proper context. Therefore, our approach here will be to focus on some basic overarching concepts. We will get to individual issues eventually, but if we first have a sound general framework in place we should be able to deal with the specific issues more constructively and effectively.

My intended audience for this work is primarily Christians. Apologetics is valuable, and I admire those who eloquently articulate and defend the faith to those who do not (yet) follow Jesus, but that is not my purpose here. While this material may have some apologetic value (in showing scientifically literate people that one need not reject science to accept Jesus), it is mainly for the education of the church, in the hope that my fellow Christians can gain a healthy perspective. Today, many people won't even consider Jesus because of foolish pseudoscience advocated by some Christians, and many young Christians find their faith endangered because they are poorly prepared to deal with these issues as they encounter the world. If the numbers in these categories are reduced even slightly, this project will have been worthwhile.

Much good written material (in addition to a deluge of unhelpful material) exists on many of these topics. A Bibliography for suggested further reading can be found at end of each chapter. When I taught this as a Sunday School class, I recommended reading the book *Toward a Christian View of a Scientific World*, by George L. Murphy (CSS Publishing, 2001). I reiterate that recommendation here; Murphy's book is a fine introduction for developing a sound Christian way of looking at science-related issues. More recently, another excellent introductory book has appeared that would now be my #1 recommendation: *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* by Deborah and Loren Haarsma of Calvin College (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2nd Ed., 2011). I also commend as a source for information the American Scientific Affiliation (www.asa3.org), a professional affiliation for Christians in science, and Biologos (www.biologos.org).

Finally, a couple of notes. Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). If you are reading this document because some search engine took you here, the “home page” for this course is <http://steamdoc.itgo.com/sci-nature/index.html>.

This material began as speaking notes for an adult Sunday School class taught at First Presbyterian Church of Boulder, Colorado, in Spring 2007. I thank the Spiritual Formation and Discipleship Department at First Pres for allowing me to teach the class, the 20-30 participants who contributed constructive insights and questions and generally kept me on my toes, and my wife for putting up with my many evenings spent buried in this project.