

Essentials of Christian Faith and Fundamentals of Science

How can I claim to be a Christian and how can I claim to be scientist at the same time? The answer lies in accepting as true the essentials of Christianity and the fundamentals of the scientific enterprise. Now for the skeptic there are lots of people who claim to be Christians and many who claim to be scientists but upon closer look they do not adhere to the essentials and fundamentals below and I would claim they pervert one or both. Creation Science in my view fails in both, being neither real science or real faith in the Living God of the Bible.

A corollary to the opening question above might be; “Does science disprove the existence of God or eliminate the need for a creator?” Not for me, but I know many scientist with whom I share the same deep knowledge of science who would argue that they have no need to believe in God or at least the God of the Bible. They use science as their reason and I would accept the Bible when it says “for since the creation the world of God’s invisible qualities- his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

I attended a bible study on essential Christian doctrines. This study illuminated for me why I naturally grew in Faith in the living triune God and in knowledge of the natural world, resolving along the way apparent conflicts. It was upon retirement in 2006 that I became fully aware of the popular belief there was a conflict between science and the Bible. Further there is concern among Christians that scientific advances cast a shadow of doubt on the truthfulness of the Bible. So I set out to witness to the harmony of Faith and science in my own life. The Bible study today revealed a deeper understanding of Faith and Science.

Let me start with the 12 essential Christian doctrines that were presented along with biblical references.* I do this without elaboration, encouraging you to look up the verses.

They are:

1. **God’s Unity:** Deuteronomy 6:4 and 1 Corinthians 8:5-6
2. **The Trinity:** 2 Thessalonians 1:2, John 1:1 and Mathew 28:19
3. **Human Depravity:** Romans 3:9-20 and John 3:3
4. **The Virgin Birth:** Luke 1:34-35 and Matthew 1:18
5. **The Sinlessness of Christ:** Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22 and 2 Corinthians 5:21
6. **Christ’s Diety and**
7. **Christ’s Humanity:** John 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-8, Galatians 4:4-5 and 1 John 4:2-3
8. **God’s Grace:** Romans 5:10 and Titus 3:5
9. **Faith:** Ephesians 2:8-9
10. **Christ’s Atoning Death:** Romans 3: 25-26
11. **Jesus’ Bodily Resurrection:** 1 Corinthians 15: 1-6
12. **Christ’s Second Coming:** Acts 1:11 and Revelation 1:7

Starting from a young child to retirement years today, I have been instructed through the Christian Church and Christian education in the meaning of these 12 doctrines. They come alive for me on every page of the Bible serving as a lens to understand the more obscure writings. I have come to realize that in them is the heart of God’s message and that they serve as the unifying storyline for all of the Bible.

For me they confirm that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. The essentials are not the reason why I have a living relationship with the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier God. They are not the reason I believe in the God of the Bible. These essentials are the framework for knowing what I believe to be true about God through Faith. They are a check against false doctrines or those belief systems that I would consider errant or even of the devil. They are the chapters in the storyline of who our God is and what He has done and is doing! They are the check list to test other religions and teachings and judge them to be true or false. Although they cannot be proven only witnessed to they provide a world view that makes all science knowledge understandable and rational.

Now what I realized today is that I can hold to these essentials and at the same time accept the scientific evidence that reveals the evolution of the material universe and its perfect design for life, especially the spirit breathed life that is man.

I have been privileged to be part of nationally recognized team of scientists/educators who have set out to redefine scientific literacy. Below is what that team would say are the fundamental concepts underlying all of scientific knowledge.**

The 8+1 Fundamental Science Concepts

Preamble: What is Science? What is Science For?

- Science is able to explain the way the natural world works by means of a small number of laws of nature.
- These laws often expressed mathematically, are explored using tools such as observation, measurement, and description
- Information is synthesized into understanding through creative thought with prediction continually tested by observation and measurement.

How do know what we know?

Answer: Inquiry (+1)

Of what are things made?

1. Everything is made of atoms and atoms are composed of subatomic particles.
2. Cells are the basic units of organisms.
3. Electromagnetic radiation pervades our world.

How do systems interact and change?

4. Evolution: Systems evolve and change with time according to simple underlying rules or laws.
5. Parts of a system move and interact with each other through forces.
6. Parts of a system can exchange energy and matter when they interact.
7. Physical concepts like energy and mass can be stored and transformed but are never created or destroyed.
8. Life systems evolve through variation.

These fundamentals are key guides for scientific investigations. In a complex systems ranging from stars to the human body, one always needs to know which atoms and how are they arranged, and for living organisms which cells, what are their roles and inner functions, and does light have any impact on the system being studied. Once these fundamentals are considered the more complex interactions of energy and matter can be studied but always in the constraints of the laws that govern the forces, and mass/energy transfers. In the study of any system it is necessary to account for all transfer for energy and matter in and out of the system being studied. All this to say that the 8+1 are indeed fundamental to science knowledge and investigations.

Although scientific knowledge is constrained by the above fundamental concepts it has allowed us to build an understanding of the natural world and that understanding has exploded in the 20th and 21st Century. Staying within the limit of these fundamental concepts humanity has built a story line for the history and structure of the universe and all that is in it. This story line is now a beautiful tapestry that weaves together knowledge from every field of science. “Dust we are and to dust we shall return”, but we now know the very elements of that dust were synthesized in stars and dispersed in the supernova death of stars. Each new discovery tests our understanding of the story line. Each new discovery opens the door to technologies not imagined 50 years ago. One consequence of this explosion of knowledge is that science finds itself infringing on areas assigned to theological beliefs. So we are forced back to our essentials of Christian doctrine.

When faced with apparent conflicts of Faith and science I now realize that I stand on the essential doctrines of Christianity to guide my exploration of the intersection of Faith and science. At the same time I can fearlessly use the fundamentals of science to guide my understanding of the natural world and its implications. From this often comes a deeper understanding of the Creator God who reveals himself both through creation and revelation. However there are times of apparent conflict that are not so immediately resolvable. The key is to understand the limitations of scientific knowledge and to understand our own tendency to put our limited reasoning above trusting when it comes to matters of faith. I would say if you are confronted by an apparent faith and science conflict, you can be sure it is not a conflict for God and simply enjoy the mystery of it all.

So now the question for the Christian is “Is my faith founded on the Rock or the sand? Does this faith reveal the truth of the 12 essential doctrines of Christianity?” I would answer yes for myself. However, I have had to continually look more deeply at the Word of God and its message in light of what I take to be the truth of God’s creation revealed through reason and scientific investigation. When you realize that the very personal God of the Bible is the same Creator of our universe so outrageously large, so powerful and so fine tuned for life, you stand in awe and are not quick to say what and how God could have accomplished bringing the world and a people for himself into existence. When you ponder the depths of space-time, realizing we now know that time and space are not absolutes but linked and interchangeable, you have no trouble believing in a Creator God unconfined by time and space. When you consider the illusive quantum nature of atoms and molecules you have no problem believing that the God who sustains it all could easily have arranged the perfect complementary DNA in Mary for her to be with Child by the Holy Spirit. It was God choosing to do this out love for us that is truly amazing.

Finally my advice to the Christian faced with the atheist who denies the existence of God on the basis of science knowledge is to not fear but to know the essentials doctrines of your Christian Faith and know that they cannot be undone by scientific knowledge. Also know the nature of science and its fundamentals. Remember that “The fool says in his heart there is no God.” No matter how smart we are, we will all bow our knees to the Lord Jesus and think “how foolish were our imaginations of reality” when the full nature of the New Heaven and New Earth are revealed.

It is the God of the Bible who created order in the universe and we have the privilege in our lifetime to know Him through His creation and this knowledge would have amazed the great scientist of the past, many who also believed in the God of the Bible.

Thanks be to God.

Rollie Otto

*Acknowledgement: Copied from Outline of Lesson Entitled “Essential Christian Doctrines” by Pastor Ed Krueger, Emmanuel Lutheran Church (January 29, 2012)

**Ref: *Towards Coherence in Science Instruction: A Framework for Science Literacy*, William Schmidt et.al ,Research Report Vol 8, October 2011, Michigan State University,
(http://www.promse.msu.edu/_documents/PROMSE-Coherent%20Science-PRRvol8.pdf)

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