

Faith Community Church, Roslyn, PA, 1968

Science and the Scriptures

Robert C. Newman

What is Science?

Various Definitions:

- Systematic knowledge of natural or physical phenomena
- Truth ascertained by observation, experiment and induction
- An ordered arrangement of facts known under classes or heads
- Theoretical knowledge as distinguished from practical
- Knowledge of principles and rules of invention, construction and mechanism, as distinguished from art

A General Definition: the systematic study of and knowledge about the real world

Science as method: the empirical method (actually, systematized common sense)

1. Examine data.
2. Construct a hypothesis:
 - a. Fitting the known data;
 - b. As simple as possible consistent with a.
3. Apply deductive logic to the hypothesis to obtain testable consequences.
4. Re-examine data to check these consequences.

Comments

Science involves both art and scholarship; often considerable brilliance is required to construct a theory; if enough data are available, it is usually easier to test a theory than to construct one.

The general definition (above) and the scientific method are not just confined to the so-called exact sciences; one should study the Bible in this way, too.

Should we expect scientific statements in the Bible?

Yes, certainly if the general definition (above) is used.

What about science in the more restricted sense, such as the first of the various definitions above?

- The Bible is not a science textbook.
- Yet it claims to be written by inspiration of God, who is the creator and sustainer of the world.
- Thus we should expect mistakes to be avoided, just as we would for a good scientist writing simple material in the field of his competence.

To what extent is science a scriptural activity?

It is commanded and approved.

- Man commissioned to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28).
- Example of Daniel, Solomon, etc.

The problem of sin: applies to Christians as well as to non-Christians; affects one's outlook (cp. Prov 9:10, 14:12).

Still, careful investigation is enjoined (Prov 14:15, 12:15, 25:2).

The occurrence of science in the Scriptures

Inspiration and consequent lack of error; how this material becomes revelation.

Examples of pre-science, to give assurance (Prov 22:19-21)

- Jacob's sheep (Gen 30:37-39, 31:10-12)
- Pleiades and Orion (Job 38:31-32)
- See examples in McMillen, *None of These Diseases*; Stoner, *Science Speaks*.

Problems of Interpretation

Have such problems both in nature and the Bible

- Copernicus: response of Luther, Calvin and Roman Catholics
- Fixity of species: Agassiz and "kinds"

Great care is necessary to avoid pitfalls here.

- Reading things into Scripture (or nature)
- Overstating the case
 - Too much certainty on an unclear point
 - Going beyond what is stated – Calvin's point
- The importance of context
 - Who is speaking? (e.g., the fool; Jacob, above)
 - What is he talking about? (19th cen teetotaler quote of "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!")
 - Is the statement intended to be literal? (Jesus: "I am the door")

Conclusion

Adherence to God's word as thoroughly reliable has proven to be the safest policy (Albright, Thiele; Prov 21:30).