



# Bible Class: Reason and Faith

## What if Bible Class were about reason and faith working together?

Evan, an experienced Bible teacher, had a growing unease about his students' division between faith and reason. This division tended to focus on seeing science as based on reason alone, while religion was irrational and "just opinion." Evan felt that if this issue were not discussed explicitly, it would undercut both Bible class and science education in the school.

"I decided to give a Bible lesson on this issue. I changed my approach and invited a science teacher, Lauren, to work with me. Lauren began with a PowerPoint presentation of scientists of faith through history to give students some background, ending with modern scientists who are Christians, such as Francis Collins and John Polkinghorne.

"I gave a presentation of well-known atheistic scientists and their arguments. We then changed our teaching style by modeling an open conversation between the two of us about faith and reason, stressing that faith can't be proven by reason; but that doesn't mean that reason is not part of faith, or that science consists only in proving things. Reason could be part of the way in which we are made in the image of God, but reason is not the only way we gain knowledge. In all walks of life (including science) we use a range of ways of knowing. For example, we gain knowledge empirically from evidence and intuitively through relationships, as well as through our ethical sense of what is right.

"During the conversation, students were asked to write down any questions they wanted to ask; the rest of the session was devoted to their questions and discussion."

## What's going on here?

Evan saw his Bible lesson as an opportunity to explore false dichotomies between faith and reason and to look at how faith and science might connect.

He engaged students by having them interact with a visitor who represented another area of knowledge, by discussing big questions about faith and reason, and by

considering examples that might make them rethink their opinions.

He reshaped his practice by changing the class interaction (listening to a conversation), modeling engagement with the issues, using resources to challenge student assumptions (presentation of Christian scientists), inviting student questions, and making connections that provoked reflection (having the science teacher present faith and the religion teacher present atheism).

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Evan saw faith and reason as complementary, and he put no divide between the sacred and the secular. He modeled asking questions about faith and values in Bible class and science, and he did not divide knowledge into water-tight compartments. Knowledge is not divided into religious knowledge, scientific knowledge, or geographical knowledge in the Bible; to quote St. Augustine, "All truth is God's truth."

## What difference does it make?

By bringing this issue to the surface, Evan enabled his students to engage with it openly rather than letting assumptions about religion and reason undercut both Bible class and science. He also raised student awareness of the assumptions they were making by the way he taught.

## Where could we go from here?

There are other assumptions that underpin subjects that could be brought to the surface. How they are presented will be determined by the issue; for example, the misconception that the spiritual is unearthly and the opposite of the material.

## Digging deeper

In showing that faith and reason can go together, Evan was beginning to break down the sacred-secular divide. This is the idea that there is a secular world, and in a separate realm there is religious belief that is viewed as a private hobby that does not impact on public life or any parts of the curriculum except Bible class. Some people would say that faith has nothing to say to science or other subjects because they are out of its field. This attitude has led to the fragmentation of knowledge into parts often seen as unrelated to each other and to God. This division of knowledge is a relatively modern idea.

*Until about a century and a half ago, scientists and scholars commonly assumed that knowledge formed a coherent whole; more precisely, they assumed that all parts of knowledge ultimately could be connected because every area of knowledge focused on some aspect of one single divine creation. J. Turner*

To accept no divide between sacred and secular means seeing faith as integral to all subjects and all areas of life. Such a view of the world means seeing a whole subject differently, not just tacking something religious onto a basically secular subject. Exploring a subject from a Christian perspective might involve exploring the big issues, asking ethical and religious questions, and making connections across a range of areas. There is a deep interconnectedness in the world (Acts 17:28).

The material world—the world science deals with—can be the door to the sacred (Psalms 19:1), because often it is through the world and our senses that we perceive God. The beauty of the stars, the structure of a crystal, the elegance of a formula, and the intricacies of the human body can all potentially lead to a religious experience.



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