



Biblical Responses to Secular Beliefs

(4) Faith, Reason and Knowledge (2)

Proverbs 1:7

Romans 1:18-23

Hebrews 11:1-3

Rev. Jerry Hamstra
Riverside ARP Church
February 3, 2019

This is the fourth sermon in a series of sermons called “Biblical Responses to Secular Beliefs.” The conviction behind these sermons is that the secular worldview is most dangerous false teaching of our time and place and the biblical rationale for tackling this subject is the importance in Scripture of defending the faithful against false teaching. In one sense this series is an extended application of Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 10:5 where we read, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ....” A little further on in that passage, Paul explains why he felt that it was important to destroy the arguments of the false teachers. In 2 Corinthians 11:3 he writes, “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

There is lots of false teaching out there, but the secular worldview is everywhere. And while we in our little conservative Reformed circles have been blessed in that the number of those who have turned their back on God and his Truth is relatively small, one is too many and there have been more than one. Furthermore, in the larger evangelical church, the numbers are significantly higher. But apart from people actually leaving the faith as a result of being influenced by secular thinking, we can all be influenced by it so that our faith and confidence in God and his truth are weakened and so it is a useful thing for all of us to have a little clearer idea of where and how and why the secular

worldview is not only false, but so far from the truth that it has no foundation in reason or in any other way.

That does not mean that there is nothing reasonable about it. It uses reason well when it comes to science and technology. Science and technology are impressive uses of reason. Where the scientific worldview is unreasonable, and irrational is when it deals with the foundational worldview questions – such as, “Where did everything come from?” and “What does it all mean?” At that level, the whole history of secular philosophy has been one long exercise in escaping what every human being knows to be true by virtue of the fact that we are all made in the image of God – that the God of the Bible exists and that we are all accountable to him.

So, this morning we are going to continue thinking about the relationship between faith, reason and knowledge. The reason is that this is a foundational topic in destroying the arguments that are raised against the knowledge of God by the secular worldview and because this is the kind of topic that you need to take some time with in order to grow in your understanding.

The texts that we will be considering will be some of the same texts that we have looked at before. Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” And Romans 1:18-23, “¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” Hebrews 11:1-3, “¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³By faith we

understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."

The teaching of the Bible is that true knowledge begins with God. We are going to continue exploring that idea in this sermon.

We can know that $1+1=2$ without beginning with God, but we cannot know the true meaning of $1+1=2$ without beginning with God because mathematics comes from God. The only reason that there is such a thing as mathematics is that mathematics first exists in God's mind and he has created a world that operates according to mathematics and he has created human minds that can think mathematical thoughts. God has an orderly reasonable mind and he has made a reasonable orderly world and he has created human beings to with reasonable orderly minds that correspond to the reasonable orderly world that he created.

This is one application of the biblical truth that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. To truly understand the significance of $1+1=2$ you must begin with God and understand that it is a reflection of the mind of God. And if you think of $1+1=2$ without referring to God, you do not understand it truly. It just hangs there in midair, as it were. You understand something, but if you think of $1+1=2$ while not believing in God, you really have no idea of why there is such a thing as mathematics in the first place. It is just there without a reason to be there.

The fact that $1+1=2$ means that the world is structured in an orderly way and that our minds are made in such a way that they can follow and understand that structure. All of the mathematical equations and rules that you find in all the math textbooks reflect the fact that the world works according to orderly principles or laws. All the observations and laws and patterns that you find in all the science textbooks, also reflect the fact that the world is an orderly world and that it operates according to consistent laws and principles. And the fact that human beings can read and write those books means that our minds are able to discover and understand those principles. There is a fit between the orderliness of the world with all its laws and principles and our minds which are able to discover and understand those orderly patterns and laws of nature.

$1+1=2$ is an example of the fact that the world is an orderly dependable world. The opposite of orderly is chaos. If there were no God, there would not be anything else either, but even if you grant that something could exist apart from God, just for sake of argument, there would be no order, no math or laws of nature. Without the mind of God behind it all, any stuff that did exist would be without any order or structure. Order and structure cannot not exist apart from a mind – apart from intelligence. It cannot just be there without a cause.

The fact that $1=1=2$ requires a world created by an orderly mind and so it requires the God of the Bible. To believe that math and order can exist apart from God is an example of the futility of all thinking that does not begin with God. It requires you to believe in things that cannot be true and that is not a reasonable way to think.

The Bible teaches that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge and what that means when we apply it to $1+1=2$ is that math comes from the mind of God who built it into the creation and into the minds of human beings so that human beings are designed by God to figure out how the world works and develop it for his use and pleasure to the glory of God.

The secular worldview has a problem here. The secular worldview believes that $1+1=2$ but it has no good explanation of why the world is an orderly world or why the human mind is an orderly mind. Indeed, it has no reasonable explanation for why the human mind even exists.

Last week we saw that the secular worldview claims to be based on reason and it claims that the biblical worldview is based on a blind faith. Secular people claim that their understanding of the world is based on evidence and experiments and careful scientific reasoning, while the biblical worldview is based on faith in the Bible and therefore is based on faith and not on reason.

The Biblical response to this is that the beginning of any true knowledge is faith in God's revelation and that any attempt to understand the world apart from faith in God's revelation can lead only to foolishness and darkness. A huge example of that foolishness is that the secular worldview claims to be based on reason, but it can't even account for

the existence of reason in the first place. The secular worldview believes in reason without a reason.

A related way of addressing this issue of faith and reason and knowledge is to show that everyone's way of looking at the world is rooted in faith. Christians do not deny that their worldview is rooted in faith in the word of God, but what we must press upon secular people is that their worldview is also based on faith in convictions that cannot be proven by science or in any other way.

We go back to $1+1=2$. We believe that we live in the kind of orderly world in which $1+1=2$ because the world was made by God who has a rational mind which is the source of all wisdom and knowledge and the laws and the orderliness of the world. The fact that the world is an orderly place and that the human mind fits so seamlessly with the orderly world is an amazing thing.

The secular worldview believes that its view is based on reason, but that is not something that can be proved. Secular people just assume that reason is the only source of truth, but for them reason is just there. They have no reason for reason in the first place. Their trust in reason is an article of faith and that trust is an irrational leap of faith. It cannot be proved by science. Indeed, science points in the other direction. The laws of science say that everything happens for a reason. But science cannot explain the reason there is reason in the first place. The secular worldview is based on the faith that nothing and time and chance somehow caused the order that we see in the world and that it is also by nothing and time and chance that our minds somehow fit with the world in which we live. But that faith is a blind and irrational faith that flies in the face of what reason and sciences actually tell us about the way the world works.

Science tells us that if things are just left alone, they disintegrate – they fall apart. Think of an old barn that you see when you are driving through the countryside – an old barn that has been neglected. It was built by people using their minds, but after a century of neglect it is falling apart. Things left on their own eventually just disintegrate. The secular people want us to believe that without any direction from an intelligent mind, and without any pre-existing material even, the world

came from nothing all by itself and that it moved from randomness to orderliness all by itself – just by chance and a lot of time. That is a huge article of faith. The secular worldview is based on faith no less than the biblical worldview is based on faith. The big difference is that the faith in the Bible corresponds to the world as we know it. The faith of the secular worldview does not correspond with the world as we know and experience it.

There is nothing impossible about believing in God and that he made the world and us to fit into the world and that he revealed himself to us through nature and through his word. That conviction is rooted in faith, but reason – thinking, etc., confirms it because our experience of the world fits with what we expect based on what the Bible tells us about God and human beings and sin and all the rest.

The secular worldview is based on faith, but the difference is that secular people believe things that are actually logically impossible. People who believe that reality began with nothing and then all of a sudden there was something and that something happened by chance and that that original stuff that somehow appeared without a cause somehow organized itself into the orderly universe that we see today are not believing something that is improbable. They are believing something that is impossible. And that is fundamentally unreasonable. It is irrational to believe in reason without a good reason. Believing that reason just happened without a reason is very foolish.

So, we have been thinking about reason and the orderliness of the world and of our minds to interact with the world. The secular worldview claims to be based on reason, but their faith in reason is faith in something that is impossible. It is not rational to believe that the orderly world and the human mind came into being all by themselves just by chance. And the more scientists discover the complexity of the world and the human mind the more irrational it is to believe that all of that just happened all by itself.

This idea is based on the biblical teaching that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. It is also based on the biblical teaching that those who reject the knowledge of God will automatically become futile and foolish in their thinking so that they are walking in darkness rather

than light. The biblical teaching is that the only way to think rightly about anything is to begin with God's revelation. Then you have a solid foundation for the use of reason.

There is another way that the Scripture makes this point and I want to show that to you now. The biblical idea of wisdom is that the world and human relationships work in orderly and predictable ways and that that order and predictability comes from God and that human wisdom consists of learning how the world works and living according to it. Some wisdom comes from reading it in the Bible. Some wisdom comes from learning from experience what works and what does not work.

So, for instance, Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." This is an example of how the world works. There is an order, a predictability to this. Someone who thinks he knows everything and never seeks or listens to advice is a fool and he will tend to make many mistakes that could have been avoided. Someone who realizes that he does not have all the answers and that advice from other people is valuable is conforming to the way that God has created the world and human beings to function in it and he will have more success in life than the person who does not consider the advice of people who are wiser than he.

Here we again have the idea that there is a certain order, a predictability built into the creation. Some ways of living work and other ways of living do not work very well. That is the biblical idea of wisdom. And Proverbs 8 describes how God, at the time of creation, structured the world according to the principles of wisdom. In the passage that I am going to quote, wisdom is personified, which means that wisdom is speaking. It is clear that the wisdom who is speaking is God's wisdom. Here are the verses, Proverbs 8:22-31, ²²"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. ²³Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, ²⁶before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. ²⁷When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸when he made

firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man."

These verses are saying that wisdom was right there with God when he created the world. This is a poetic way of teaching us that God created the world by wisdom and what that means is that the principles of the wisdom of God are built into the world. This is just another biblical way of getting at the fact that the orderliness and rational structure of the creation are a reflection of the wisdom of the Creator. The book of Proverbs and the other wisdom literature of the Bible expounds the practical implications of this for human life. God's wisdom is embedded into the structure of the world and human life and so in order to live a life that is successful one must discover those principles of wisdom both from the Bible and from experience in life and conform one's life to them.

So, the Bible tells us in a number of different way that the orderly and predicable nature of the world is there because that is how God created the world. And living wisely in the world means living in harmony with the way the world is rather than living against the grain of the way that the world actually is. This is the background for all that the Bible says about living wisely and living foolishly. The secular worldview is one of collective foolishness from this perspective because it is irrational – that it is rooted in a whole nest of impossibilities. The secular world view is based on a number of beliefs that could not possibly be true – as we have been seeing.

But that is not the end of the foolishness of the secular worldview. There are many ways that the secular worldview is massively out of sync with the world as we experience it. For instance, secular people often make a big deal about human rights. And in principle that is a good thing, although some of the applications of it are harmful rather than life-affirming such as the connection between human rights and sinful lifestyles.

But human rights do not follow logically from the secular worldview. If there is no God and if human beings are the products of random accidents and time and chance, we have no more value than trees or mosquitos. There is no reason in the light of the secular worldview that humans should not kill other human beings that they find irritating or troublesome. Some human beings like Nietzsche and Hitler and Stalin followed the logical implications of the secular worldview and believed that the way to make the world a better place is to kill the people whom you see as the problem. That fits with the secular worldview. Most people view that way of denying human rights to be evil, but the idea that human beings have rights does not follow from the secular worldview. If this physical world is all that there is, it makes perfect sense to kill people you do not like.

But people cannot live consistently on the basis of the secular worldview. Few people can live as if human beings are worthless and dispensable. The Hitlers and the Stalins of the world lived consistently on the basis of their worldview. But most people cannot live that way – that is, they cannot live as if there is no difference between killing a human being or killing a dog. Human rights is a Christian concept. It is rooted in the biblical truth that human beings are made in the image of God. Secular people borrow it without acknowledging the background that gives it meaning. There are a number of secular historians that acknowledge that the concept of human rights arose as a result of Christian principles.

What this illustrates is the fact that people cannot live consistently on the basis of the secular worldview because the secular worldview does not fit with life as we experience it. There can be no basis for human rights if the world is nothing more than randomly arranged stuff, but the vast majority of people are not able to live consistently with the idea that human rights is just a social subjective category and not a part of the nature of things. In Christianity human rights are part of the nature of things because human beings are made in the image of God and therefore possess a value that is far greater than the stuff out of which they are made.

And there are all kinds of aspects of life that are like this. If we begin with God and the Bible, human experience makes sense – our experience of life fits with what the Bible teaches us about life. We know why we feel guilty. We know why there is love. We know why we are personal. We know why we know that there is more to us than just our bodies. We know why it is natural to believe that God exists and that it takes indoctrination to bring people to the point of denying God's existence.

The secular worldview cannot explain any of the things that make life so precious while the biblical worldview explains all of these things because it is rooted in the existence of the biblical God who is personal and who is intelligent and who is moral and who is love. The secular worldview gives explanations for the existence of the world that are logically impossible, but on top of that the world is much different than it would be if the theory of evolution were true. Evolution cannot rationally account for anything because of the huge role it gives to chance, but it certainly cannot account for the deeper spiritual and psychological and moral aspects of human life. The jump from nothing to something and then from random something to orderly something, and then from orderly physical stuff to the profound spiritual, psychological and moral aspects of life is a whole list of impossibilities. At the end of the day our experience of life is nothing like what you would expect if the secular worldview were true.

The Christian faith is basic on faith. The revelation from God in nature and in the Bible is the foundation of all knowledge and that revelation must be accepted by faith in that revelation. But that does not mean that the Christian faith is unreasonable. It is in fact the only way to be reasonable because it is rooted in the One who is the way, the truth and the life.

The One whom we as Christians worship and love as our Saviour and our Lord is a personal being who is the basis of the existence of the world and of life and of our rich relational and intelligent experience of life. Listen to how the apostle Paul speaks of this in Colossians 2:1-4, "1For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2that

their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments."