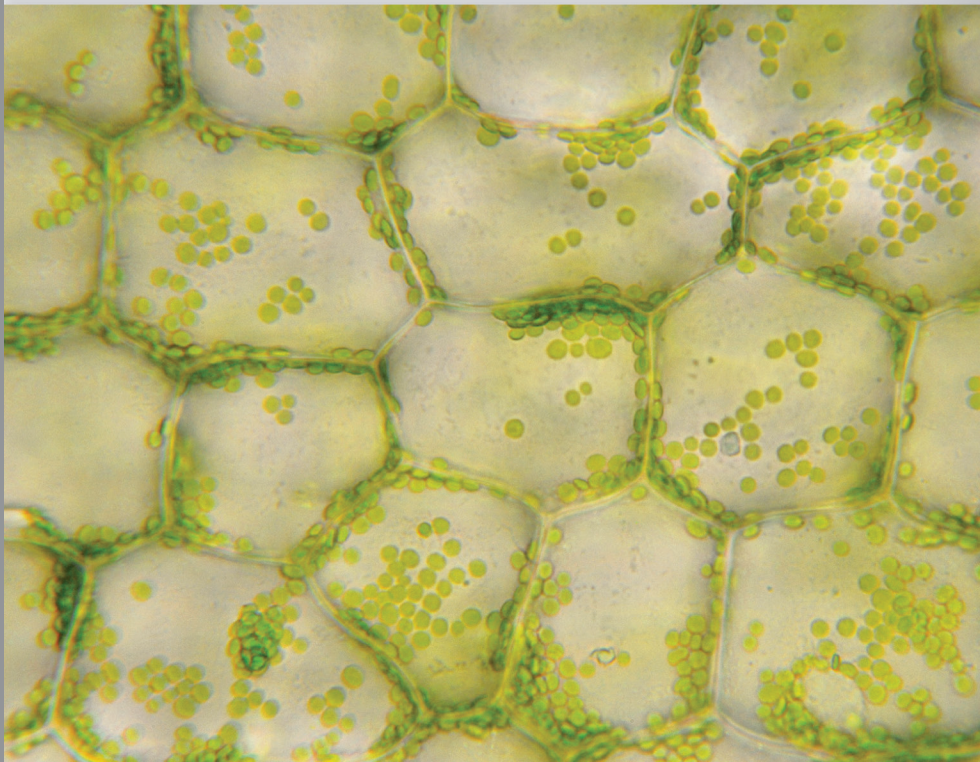


S T U D Y   G U I D E



# Creation or Chaos

by R.C. Sproul



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R.C. Sproul



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# Saving the Phenomena

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

In previous centuries, something of a cooperative enterprise existed between theology and science. Yet in the modern era, there is a fierce sense of conflict between faith and science. The shift in thinking began with the Copernican Revolution and continues to this day. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul provides background to the contemporary debate and explains why the rift between true theology and true science is unnecessary.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain how the division between theology and science originated and what has brought it to where it is today
2. To be able to summarize some of the common interests and common goals of theology and science
3. To grasp the significance of the Copernican Revolution in the history of the relationship between theology and science

## QUOTATIONS

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*

—The Apostles' Creed

*It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.*

—The Westminster Confession of Faith 4.1

## LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. In the modern era, there is a fierce sense of conflict between faith and science.
  - 1. Modern man has a sense of awe for science.
  - 2. In earlier centuries, there was something of a cooperative enterprise between theology and science.
  - 3. The Copernican Revolution drove a wedge between the two that exists to this day.
- B. Science and theology actually have many things in common.
  - 1. Both theology and science are interested in salvation.
    - a. Salvation in theology has to do with man's reconciliation with God.
    - b. Salvation in science has to do with "saving the phenomena."
  - 2. Plato articulated the concept of salvation in which science is interested.
    - a. At the entrance to his academy, he had these words posted on the door: "Let none but geometers enter here."
    - b. We usually think of Plato as a philosopher, not a mathematician, so why the inscription?
    - c. What Plato meant by *geometer* was one who is interested in the concept of "form," or what we call formal truth.
    - d. As a philosopher, he was interested in those ideas that would somehow make sense of all the disparate elements of the material world that we encounter every day.
    - e. Plato was looking behind matter for ultimate truth; for him, geometry was a kind of philosophy.
  - 3. In the history of philosophy and the history of theology, many important insights have come from those who were also mathematicians or scientists.
    - a. Men such as Spinoza, Descartes, Pascal, and Kant saw a unity between the material world and the world of ideas.
    - b. They did not see science in competition or disjunction with philosophy and theology.
- C. According to Plato, the overarching concern of the scholar is to "save the phenomena."
  - 1. "Phenomena" refers to those things that appear to the external senses.
  - 2. Anything we see, hear, taste, touch, or smell is part of the phenomena of reality.
  - 3. As a scientist and philosopher, Plato was interested in coming up with a philosophical system or theoretical system that could explain in a coherent and rational way all of the particulars of life as we experience it.
  - 4. This is the task of the scientist—to save the phenomena—to make sense out of the world around us.
- D. In every generation, there are changes in the theories (or paradigms) of the time.
  - 1. Sometimes the changes are gradual; at other times they are catastrophic and revolutionary.

2. When a paradigm shift occurs, a theory that better explains the phenomena is constructed.
  3. The shift that created the greatest upheaval was the Copernican Revolution of the sixteenth century.
  4. For centuries, all scientists had worked within the same geocentric framework in which the earth was considered to be the center of the universe.
  5. Copernicus challenged this idea.
    - a. Ptolemy had developed the geocentric theory—with the sky like a crystal canopy—and although the theory couldn't account for the movement of the planets very well, it worked reasonably well.
    - b. Copernicus claimed that the sun was at the center of the cosmos, and ironically his theory did not initially produce results as accurate as those of the Ptolemaic model.
  6. As we learn more about the world, we discover anomalies that do not fit the current system.
  7. If the anomalies become significant enough and numerous enough, they begin to raise questions about the whole structure, and this is what causes a structure to change.
  8. Today, theories change rapidly.
- E. Science and theology share the common pursuit of making sense out of the world in which we live.
1. Both science and theology study the sphere of nature.
  2. God reveals Himself not only in the Bible but also through the medium of nature—general revelation.
  3. All truth is God's truth, and all truth meets at the top.
  4. Augustine said that all Christians should seek to learn as much as they can about as many things as they possibly can because if something is true, it points to God.
  5. The scientific enterprise can be an enormous benefit to theology.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What paradigm shift drove a wedge between science and theology that continues to exist to this day?
  - a. Quantum physics
  - b. The Copernican Revolution
  - c. Ptolemaic geocentricity
  - d. The Darwinian theory of natural selection
2. Both theology and science are interested in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Salvation
  - b. Reconciliation with God
  - c. Quantum physics
  - d. All of the above

3. Salvation in science has to do with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Saving reputations
  - b. Saving the phenomena
  - c. Saving the planet
  - d. Saving the theory
4. At the entrance to his academy, Plato had these words posted on the door: "Let none but \_\_\_\_\_ enter here."
  - a. Theologians
  - b. Academics
  - c. Philosophers
  - d. Geometers
5. What word describes those things that appear to the external senses?
  - a. Forms
  - b. Noumena
  - c. Phenomena
  - d. None of the above
6. Who developed the geocentric theory of the cosmos?
  - a. Ptolemy
  - b. Plato
  - c. Copernicus
  - d. Galileo
7. Who challenged the geocentric idea and claimed that the sun was at the center of the cosmos?
  - a. Plato
  - b. Copernicus
  - c. Ptolemy
  - d. Calvin
8. What word is used to describe those phenomena that do not fit into an accepted paradigm?
  - a. Paradoxes
  - b. Theories
  - c. Hypotheses
  - d. Anomalies

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BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Romans 1:18–21. What does Paul say about the knowledge of God in verse 19? What does he say has been revealed about God in verse 20? According to verses 18 and 21, what has unregenerate man done with God’s general revelation of Himself?
2. According to Romans 2:14–15, what has been written on the hearts of Gentiles? Is it significant that Paul says “the work of the law” rather than “the law”? Why or why not? Is “the work of the law” written on the heart synonymous with the conscience?
3. In John 1:9 we read, “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” According to the context, who is the “true light”? Is this verse speaking of a general revelation given by this true light?
4. Read Acts 14:17 and 17:28. How did Paul incorporate the truth of general revelation into his preaching of the gospel?
5. What do the following texts say about the state of the natural man, who, although he has general revelation, is without special revelation?
  - a. Luke 1:79
  - b. Romans 1:18
  - c. Romans 1:24–25
  - d. Romans 3:9–18
  - e. Ephesians 4:18
6. How do the following passages either teach or imply the insufficiency of general revelation?
  - a. Matthew 11:27
  - b. John 14:6
  - c. John 17:3
  - d. Acts 4:12
  - e. 1 Corinthians 1:21

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the main personalities and theories involved in the Copernican Revolution. Try to imagine yourself in the shoes of those alive at the time. Why did they react the way they did? Do the reactions on all sides provide Christians today with any lessons we can learn?
2. What are some of the positive accomplishments of science that have benefited mankind as a whole? What are some of the accomplishments of science that have had negative or even disastrous consequences?



3. What are some ways in which Christians could contribute to the lessening of hostility between science and theology without compromising scriptural truth? What are some ways in which scientists could contribute to the lessening of hostility?
4. According to R.C., Augustine said that all Christians should seek to learn as much as they can about as many things as they possibly can because if something is true, it points to God. Should Christians follow Augustine's advice? Why or why not?

### APPLICATION

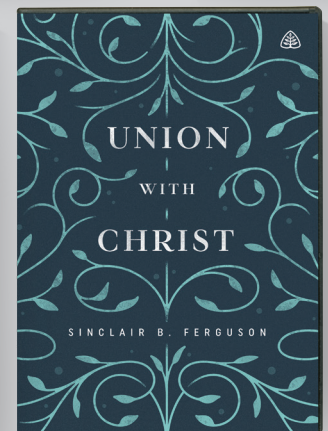
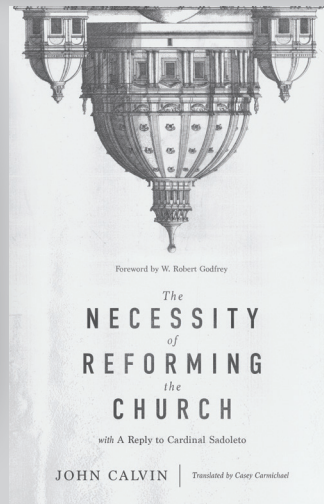
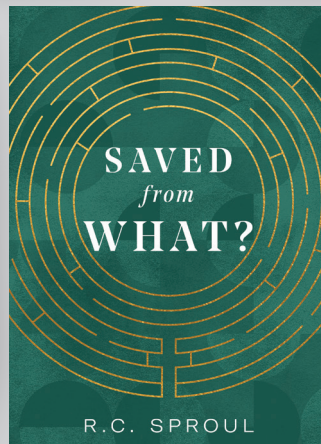
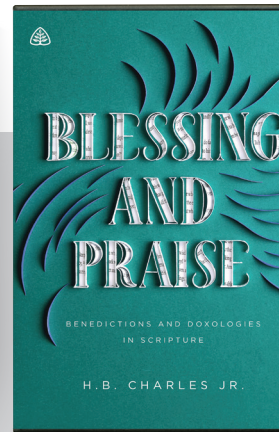
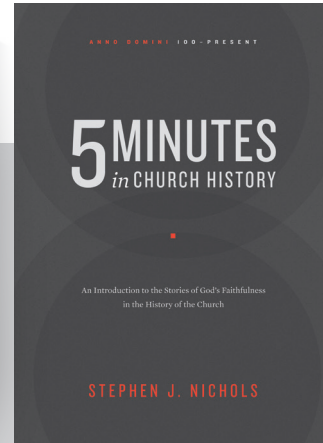
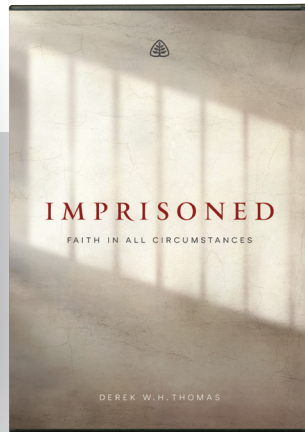
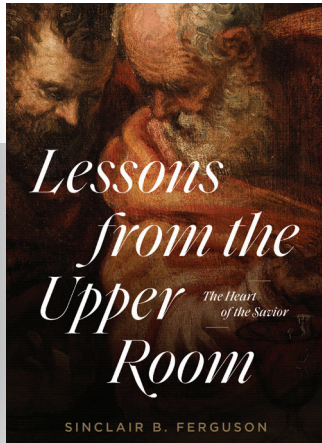
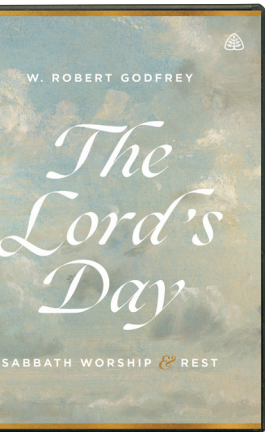
1. Have you ever struggled to reconcile the claims of science with the claims of Christianity? If so, how did you resolve the conflict?
2. Paradigm shifts occur not only in the scientific community but also within our personal lives at times. Have you ever gone through a personal "paradigm shift" in your thinking? Was the shift the result of a gradual accumulation of anomalies, or was it a sudden shift? Reflect on how God used this shift to further your growth in Christ.
3. How has this lesson given you a new appreciation for the work of natural scientists? List some of the accomplishments of scientists for which you can thank God.
4. Consider some ways in which you could begin to follow Augustine's advice in your own life. In the next month read a book or two on a subject about which you know little or nothing. Try doing this every few months.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Pearcey, Nancy R. and Charles Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*

Mathison, Keith A., *A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture*

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