



SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE



BIBLE CONFERENCE

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SYSTEMS OF UNBELIEF AND BELIEF

INTRODUCTION:

In this lesson I will cover three major systems of “unbelief”: Polytheism, Pantheism, and Rationalism as they relate to science. I call them systems of unbelief because Polytheism and Pantheism are not based on the God revealed in Scripture, and Rationalism does not recognize God at all. Because of the first two systems, societies that practiced them never advanced much with respect to science. Rationalism, on the other hand, was a reaction to the Bible and theological beliefs that came from it. From Rationalism comes the “naturalistic” science of today. The atheist Bertrand Russell commented that the result of (naturalistic) science showing us a world without purpose and meaning is “unyielding despair.”

THREE SYSTEMS OF UNBELIEF

Dr. Edward Hills who is a graduate of Yale University and holds degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary and Columbia Theological Seminary points out that in the course of human history, there have been three basic forms of false belief systems with respect to "god." To call them belief systems is a bit of a misnomer. In actuality they are really "unbelief systems" because they are systems that ignore what God has said through His prophets and the scriptures:

2 Pet. 1:21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

2 Tim. 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

The three "unbelief" systems mentioned by Hills are: polytheism, pantheism, and rationalism. All three of these systems have adversely affected science.

Polytheism

The first of these "unbelief systems," polytheism, is the worship of many gods and/or idols. Polytheism has taken many forms throughout history and is still prevalent throughout the world today. Hills says that it originated in the false system of sacrifice that was invented by Cain and carried on by his descendants until the flood in Noah's day:

Gen. 4:5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

After the Flood, according to Hills, this false polytheistic sacrificial system was introduced again by Noah's son Ham and finally carried to the ends of the earth when the nations were scattered at the tower of Babel (Gen 11). Once the people therefore had scattered upon the face of the earth, they took this false religious system with them and founded the heathen nations across the world.

As a result, these nations began to offer up sacrifices and worship to the forces of nature, images, gods, spirits, the souls of the dead, and even to birds and creeping things:

Rom. 1:21-23 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

In fact, even the nation of Israel, which had the law of Moses, the Levitical laws of sacrifice, and the prophets, eventually succumbed to the same idolatries and abominations:

Ezek. 8:10 So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. (Rom 1:23).

And so down through the centuries, and up to this present time, polytheism continues to be the most common form of false religion. Today, there is not a continent on the earth where this type of "unbelief" is not practiced.

Pantheism

The second form of "unbelief system" named by Hills is pantheism. Pantheism is a religion in which men identify God with the universe. God and the universe, so they say (the physical universe of the galaxies, stars, planets, moons, and assorted

"things"), are one and the same thing. Hinduism, a form of pantheism, was developed into a formal religion in India about 1000B.C.

The ancient Hindus taught, quoting from Hills:

"that the ultimate destiny of the human soul (atman) was absorption in the world-soul, which they called "the self-existent Brahman." This Brahman they regarded as the only reality. The material world that can be seen and touched was only an appearance. It was "maya" (illusion). The Greeks also were pantheistically inclined. The earliest of them were materialistic "monists" who believed that everything was matter, including the gods that they worshipped."

Hills comments that later Greek "thinkers," in particular Plato and Aristotle, became dualists. The universe to them consisted as mind and matter existing side by side from all eternity. There was no beginning or ending. This is called the "eternity of matter." In short, all ancient Greek philosophy was basically pantheistic.

In addition, the early Greek philosophers were known as "the people who were trying to understand the world," and "seeking to understand it purely by the use of human reason." Thus, rather than using experimentation and observation, they sought to learn about the world through thought and intuition. The philosophers were "free-thinking" people who "searched to establish an understanding" based on "human freedom" and "human autonomy," or simply put, their whole philosophy was based on "man." These philosophers thought themselves dependent on no one but themselves. As a result, they took God out of the picture so to speak. It is from these men that the seeds of 18th century naturalistic science were sown.

As you can imagine, this type of "thought process" ended up hindering science for centuries. In short, a philosophy that only relies on human reasoning ends up at a dead end. Ian Scott, writes in his article on philosophies, how the Greek philosophers negatively affected science:

"Protagoras, one of the wandering Greek teachers of the 5th Century B.C., aptly summed up his findings in the statement, 'Man is the measure of all things' (human reason is the ultimate test). This became the basic assumption running through philosophy from that time till now. Any proposition, any system of beliefs, any ideas, must be subjected to reason—human reason being the judge in all things. Unfortunately, however, at the very beginning of philosophy, a puzzle presented itself. 'What happens if two apparently reasonable people come up with two opposite points of view on a subject? Who will be the judge as to which human reason is the more reasonable?' Basically, that was the problem which could not be settled—and which has kept philosophers in a job ever since! In contrast, the Biblical position is

that man is a creature responsible to a Creator, to whom the Creator has given His Word of direction. In his letter to the Romans, Paul presents very graphically an account of the consequences of human rebellion against the Creator. Mankind knows God is God but will not submit to Him and this refusal to recognize Him as God appears to be a basic element throughout the thinking of philosophy.

Hills comments that it was in the midst of this pantheistic culture, that the foundations of the true philosophy of God and science was laid through the preaching of the gospel by the Apostles and other Christians. In other words, the "truth" started to get out and "true" science now had a chance to start.

In the preaching of the gospel, Hills says, three basic truths are given: first, God is the self-existent Creator; second, the human soul is created out of nothing in the image of God; and third, the material universe, likewise was created out of nothing. The creation included, among other things, the human body, which is the "tabernacle" of the soul. In addition, there are three principles of knowledge given in the gospel: first; God's revelation of Himself in nature and in the scriptures; second, the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's heart which makes him able to receive divine revelation; and third, the faith by which born-again believers lay hold on Christ as He reveals Himself in the Bible and how they can make Him and His eternal word the starting point of all thinking.

Not only was the truth revealed through the preaching, but it was also revealed in the scriptures. Following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, it took almost 300 years to finalize the canon of the New Testament scriptures. Although, all the New Testament had been written by 90 A.D., it took two hundred years for the "Body of Christ" to "weed out the chaff" of epistles and gospel accounts that had been written about the life of Christ and at last agree on the final 27. As a result, the world had for the first time in history, a completed revelation from God in book form. That book, the Bible, consisted of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.

Now, from the Bible, anyone could learn some basic scientific facts from a writer who knew the most about science anyone could possibly know, in other words, God the creator Himself. From this one book the reader could learn who had created the universe, what was the purpose of that creation, and from that framework seek the truth about the environment around them. He could see that there was order implicit in all things. He could see that time had a beginning and that it would have an end. He also would know that there was an eternity.

From the pages of the Bible, the reader could learn about man and what he was made of, what his "nature" was like, and how to get a "new" nature if he chose to do so. Most importantly, he could know that God had a purpose for him and His creation, and that because the Lord Jesus Christ provided redemption, atonement, and reconciliation for mankind, that there was going to be a happy ending to all the misery and suffering "in this present evil world."

Almost immediately however, Hills emphasizes, this divine philosophy of the gospel and the scriptures was corrupted and perverted by the deceitfulness of Satan. He cites one example where, in the early "church" a determined effort was made to combine Christianity with "Platonism." In this homogenized Christian/Platonic belief, matter was regarded as evil and separated from God by a series of "eons," of which Christ was thought to be one. This error was refuted at the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.), but others soon took its place.

In another example, Hills notes the merging of Christianity with polytheism in such things as offering up prayers to saints, the authority of the "organized church" over that of the Bible, and the Lord's Supper regarded as a sacrifice. As a result of these practices and many others, a false system of worship emerged, which was a counterfeit of true Biblical Christianity (Hills calls this "sacerdotalism" or priest craft.)

This false system, borrowing from both Christian and pagan doctrines and practices became the state religion throughout the Roman Empire by the decree of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Today we know this state sponsored religious absurdity as the Roman Catholic Church.

Rationalism

So far I have commented on polytheism and pantheism. The third form of "unbelieving" thought that exists is called "Rationalism." Hills notes that rationalism originated in the Middle Ages among men he calls "school men" (scholars), who tried to combine the philosophy of Aristotle with Christianity. Under the influence of Aristotle's logic they came to suppose that they could know truth independently of God and thus could stand apart from God and construct proofs of God's existence. In formulating such proofs the scholars began their thinking not with God as the center, but with facts viewed as independent of God. Naturalistic science does no different today.

The Protestant Reformation marked a turn back toward the Biblical philosophy of Christianity and placed a temporary check on the development of rationalism, but after the Reformation Period (1500-1700 A.D.) rationalism came back with a vengeance.

Modern Criticism

It was towards the end of the Reformation period that subtle if not out-right attacks on the veracity of the scriptures became commonplace. According to Hugh Ross, who has written several books about science and creation, the first "scholars" to seriously attack the Genesis creation accounts for their supposed "internal inconsistencies" were Richard Simon, a Oratorian priest (Oratorian is the name of an order of priest in the Middle ages), and Campaegius Vitringa, a Dutch Reformed theologian. For the most part, their peers ignored the comments of

Simon and Vitranga, but things really got going when a man by the name of Jean Astruc, a physician in the French royal court, started to publish his thoughts about the Bible and creation.

Astruc was born at Sauves, France in 1684. He was the son of a Protestant minister, who after he had taught medicine at Montpellier, became a member of the medical faculty at Paris. His medical writings, though numerous, are now forgotten, but a work published by him anonymously has secured for him a permanent reputation. This book was entitled: "Conjectures sur les memories originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Génèse. Avec des remarques qui appuient ou qui éclaircissent ses conjectures."

According to Ross, Astruc had the means, influence, and the motivation (he was a swindler and adulterer, not to mention he had turned from his families' Huguenot faith) to spread his ideas about the so-called inconsistencies in the Genesis account. Apparently, because of his position and education, people didn't question his credibility or his "intellectual honesty," or better said "intellectual dishonesty." In his book he wrote that Moses had borrowed and collated material from several sources in preparing his books. To back up his claim, he used the two apparently contradictory creation accounts found in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

Following him was another critic of the Bible named Johann Eichhorn, who was perhaps one of the most famous theologians of his time. Eichhorn was born in 1752 and made his career as a professor of Biblical studies at Jena and Göttingen, Germany. He was tremendously important as a founder of the New England "Transcendentalists." Because he was an influential scholar, he aroused controversy when he became one of the first to analyze the Bible scientifically and to question its authorship.

Young Americans who had the "opportunity" to study at Göttingen, men such as George Bancroft, George Ticknor, and Edward Everett, found themselves in the high point of the "Higher Criticism movement" and, in some cases, returned to New England to find that they could no longer pursue a career in the ministry "in good conscience." For Transcendentalists like Frederic Henry Hedge, Theodore Parker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, and James Freeman Clarke, the Higher Criticism of Eichhorn validated the right of an individual to question established church doctrine and beliefs, put religious authority within one's own consciousness and intuition, and, by blurring the distinction between sacred and secular literature, confirmed the power of a transcendentalist "to offer his own scripture-like pronouncement."

One of Eichhorn's published works, "Einleitung in das Alte Testament" was based primarily on Astruc's ideas, but he added that a later-born scribe, not Moses, had actually put Genesis together. Eichhorn also popularized the use of the geological findings of his day to show that the creation account was inaccurate and faulty. Although his ideas were certainly not new, he is still known today as the "founder of critical studies of the Old Testament."

As a result of German Rationalism and the attack of higher criticism on the basic

tenants of Genesis, the Bible took some very heavy "hits." Eichhorn just paved the way for others to make even more grievous accusations against the book. Hills says the following about the past few hundred years of history:

"Following in the footsteps of the medieval schoolmen, Descartes⁴ and the other 17th-century philosophers placed God in the category of things doubtful and began their thinking with "reason," that is to say, with certain convictions in their own minds which they regarded as self-evident. This led to the skepticism of the 18th century, when David Hume denied that the convictions of reason are self-evident. In order therefore to ward off Hume's attacks, Kant endowed reason with creative thinking the whole of reality. Hegel's philosophy, however was contrary to the materialist emphasis of modern science, and so during the 19th century Hegeliansism was dropped and Darwinian evolution was substituted in its place. This in turn led again to a skepticism as deep as Hume's, for if our reason comes from monkeys and apes, how can we trust it? How can we have any confidence even in the firmest convictions of our own minds?"

The Fruit of Unbelief

The result of this type of "unbelief" is typified in the comments of Lee Strobel, who is now saved, has pastored a couple of churches, and has written several books defending the existence of God, Jesus Christ, and the truth of the gospel. As a child, he went through the typical American school system, and then went on to Yale to study law. Eventually he became an award winning investigative journalist but without God and without hope in this world. Here is what he found to be the ultimate end of the "unbeliever" in his own words:

"My world view was being revolutionized, all right, yet in my youthful optimism I wasn't ready to examine some of the disheartening implications of my new philosophy. I conveniently ignored the grim picture painted by British atheist Bertrand Russell, who wrote about how science had presented us with a world that was 'purposeless' and 'void of meaning. Russell said, 'That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction...that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried - all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation

henceforth be safely built.”

CONCLUSION:

In this lesson I covered three major systems of “unbelief”: Polytheism, Pantheism, and Rationalism as they relate to science. I call them systems of unbelief because Polytheism and Pantheism are not based on the God revealed in Scripture, and Rationalism does not recognize God at all. Because of the first two systems, societies that practiced them never advanced much with respect to science. Rationalism, on the other hand, was a reaction to the Bible and theological beliefs that came from it. From Rationalism comes the “naturalistic” science of today. The atheist Bertrand Russell commented that the result of (naturalistic) science showing us a world without purpose and meaning is “unyielding despair.”