

## When Worldviews Collide

After teaching my adult Bible study class recently I came in to find a smartly dressed couple with five children already sitting in the sanctuary. I could tell they had a conservative church background by the way they greeted me and introduced themselves. I watched as they heartily sang the hymns and was encouraged by their level of engagement during the sermon. As they left, the husband made a point to compliment my preaching and said he was refreshed by our services. I left elated; certain they were strong prospects. Two months later, however, they still hadn't joined. When we asked why, I was disappointed to hear that although they loved our church, they were looking for a "reformed" congregation. As you can imagine, my heart sank. Later as I reflected on the situation, I was reminded of my own experience.

I was first introduced to Calvinism in a serious way nearly twenty years ago. I well remember wrestling with the issues of election, predestination, and foreknowledge and having my most basic assumptions challenged and shaken. It was sobering for me to find that nearly all of the men after whom I read, and by whose works I had grown in sanctification and appreciation for God were reformed in their theology. Moreover, I found that many of the stereotypical charges leveled against them were overstated. "Many Calvinists, for example, have been zealous evangelists and missionaries and have contributed powerfully to the cause of winning the lost for Christ.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in their passion for the glory of God, Calvinist have played a leading role in the renewal of worship in this generation."<sup>2</sup> It is not too much to say that, the reformed tradition offers a great deal to admire and emulate. Additionally, some of the most eloquent, forceful, and conservative pastors of our day self identify as Calvinists.<sup>3</sup> It is little wonder then that reformed theology is spreading like wildfire throughout evangelicalism and even throughout fundamentalism albeit to a much lesser degree.<sup>4</sup> There is nothing short of a Calvinist renaissance taking place across the modern theological landscape.<sup>5</sup> Despite this astonishing resurgence, there are several reasons I cannot join the ranks of the reformed. It is my intent over the course of the next several articles to explain those reasons by way of a rational and irenic critique of the Calvinist position. Before presenting my arguments, however, I first want to address the manner by which I will proceed.

### **A Conflict of Theological Paradigms:**

The reformed position involves a particular mindset – a paradigm that fundamentally shapes their understanding of God and His most basic attributes. Obviously, this mindset is not shared by those outside the Calvinist fold. This disjunction not only creates a communication barrier, but also renders virtually impossible the task of objectively evaluating evidence. Perhaps an illustration from a different fight will bring the problem into focus. Creationists are constantly embroiled in disputes with secular evolutionists, over the proper implications of the available scientific data. Creationists note, for example, the presence of digital information in DNA and conclude that it must have originated in the mind of an intelligent agent. After all as Dr. Werner Gitt has noted, "There is no known law of nature, no known process, and no known sequence of events which can cause information to originate by itself in matter."<sup>6</sup> Mutations cannot account for it. "All point mutations that have been studied on the molecular level turn out to reduce the genetic information and not to increase it."<sup>7</sup> "When its progress along the chain of transmission events is traced backward, every piece of information leads to a mental source, the mind of the sender."<sup>8</sup> This is clear enough; no one could reasonably conclude that the information in this magazine resulted from an explosion in a typewriter. In like fashion, the sheer fact that we have information in our DNA tells us that it could not have come about through a random chance process but rather must ultimately go back to a mind – in this case, the mind of God. Outside of biology, one might consider evidence from astronomy such as comets. Comets are made of ice. Every time they pass near the sun, some of this ice is blasted away and the comet loses mass. A comet can orbit the sun for roughly 10,000 years before it completely runs out of material.<sup>9</sup> Thus, if the universe really is 13.6 billion years old it is difficult to explain the continuing presence of

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<sup>1</sup>E.g. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, William Carey, and John Bunyan.

<sup>2</sup>Jerry L. Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>3</sup>E.g. John Piper, John MacArthur, Steve Lawson, Matt Chandler, etc.

<sup>4</sup>On the resurgence of Calvinism among younger evangelicals, see Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008).

<sup>5</sup>Keith Hinson, "Calvinism Resurging among Sbc's Young Elites," *Christianity Today* 41, no. 11 (1997): 86.

<sup>6</sup>Werner Gitt, *In the Beginning Was Information: A Scientist Explains the Incredible Design in Nature* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006), 106.

<sup>7</sup>Lee M. Spetner, *Not by Chance!: Shattering the Modern Theory of Evolution* (New York: Judaica Press Inc., 1999), 138.

<sup>8</sup>Gitt, 72.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.thenakedscientists.com/HTML/questions/question/1000112/>

comets. Faced with these and many other powerful pieces of evidence,<sup>10</sup> one might expect evolutionists to concede that creationism is at least viable if not true. Far from it, however, for every piece of evidence that might be offered the evolutionist has a counter theory to rescue his belief. For example, in the case of comets, knowing they do not last, secular astrophysicists conclude there must be a vast reservoir of comets beyond the visible solar system dubbed an ‘Oort Cloud’, which continuously feeds new comets into the inner solar system. When pressed for any observational evidence of an ‘Oort cloud’, however, secularists are forced to concede that, there is not any.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, given the presence of comets that cannot last, and the evolutionary worldview that requires billions of years, the idea of an ‘Oort cloud’ is consistent, even necessary. This brings into focus the root issue, which is not the evidence, but rather the worldview by which each side interprets the evidence.<sup>12</sup> Creationists and evolutionists all have the same facts. They all have access to the same DNA patterns, the same fossils, the same stars and galaxies; moreover they both have the same science. Both sides use physics, chemistry, astronomy and so forth. Why then do they draw such different conclusions? The reason is because they have a different worldview. Like a pair of colored glasses, our worldview affects the way we see and interpret evidence. Everyone comes to the evidence with certain presuppositions about how that evidence should be interpreted. It is crucial to recognize that evidence by itself, no matter how compelling it is thought to be, can ever resolve a worldview conflict because an individual’s worldview tells him what to make of the evidence.<sup>13</sup> Like it or not, the debate over Calvinism is between competing theological worldviews. This is the reason arguments between Calvinists and non-Calvinists can be so frustrating. Both sides bring a truckload of verses to the other and wonders, “why don’t you understand that these verses prove my point?” But it is useless to argue that our theological presuppositions are right *because of* the verses we offer in their defense because the opposing sides’ presuppositions tell them how to interpret those verses. Somehow we need to step back and examine the validity of our presuppositions. How can we do so?

#### **Truth Must Be Logical and Internally Consistent:**

In my judgment, for a system of thought to be considered credible, let alone accurate, it must meet at least two criteria: (1) it must be logical; (2) it must be internally consistent. These are *necessary* conditions of truth.<sup>14</sup> These criteria are not *ad hoc* benchmarks that I devised, but rather are rooted in the very nature of God. The most basic law of logic is the law of non-contradiction – that you cannot have ‘A’ and ‘not A’ at the same time in the same relationship. For instance, if I said, “my birthday ‘is’ and ‘is not’ January 1”, no one would take me seriously. You would conclude that one or the other statement is true but not both. The statements are internally inconsistent – irreconcilably so. Since they violate the laws of logic they cannot be true. But where does this law of non-contradiction come from? It originates in God’s essential nature. Scripture states, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: *he cannot deny himself*” (2 Timothy 2:13 *emphasis added*). God cannot contradict Himself.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, all truth is in God. As Colossians 2:3 reminds us, “In whom [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” As such, it follows that real wisdom, genuine knowledge – truth, since it is in and of God, cannot contradict itself. Furthermore, because God Himself is omnipresent and immutable, the laws of logic are universal and invariant. They govern every possible conceptual relationship. Thus every truth claim must adhere to the laws of logic. If an idea claims to be true but can be demonstrated to be illogical, or internally inconsistent then its claim to truth status is negated or at least severely undermined. Thus, a major burden in this series will be to demonstrate that Calvinism, especially in its most popular form, is fundamentally inconsistent and, in fact, logically incoherent. If successful then, the forthcoming articles should dissuade Christians from embracing any form of reformed theology.

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. <http://www.icr.org/recent-creation>

<sup>11</sup><http://physics.stackexchange.com/questions/26132/what-are-the-facts-that-allow-accepting-the-oort-cloud-theory>

<sup>12</sup><http://creation.com/homo-naledi>

<sup>13</sup>Cf. discussion in Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation : Resolving the Origins Debate* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009).

<sup>14</sup>The fact that these are *necessary* conditions does not make them *sufficient* conditions. A proposition may be both logical and consistent and yet be untrue. It cannot, however, be illogical and inconsistent and nevertheless be true.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. discussion of ἀπνέομαι in Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 471.