

Sir Isaac Newton was born on Christmas Day 1642. He entered Trinity College in Oxford University in 1661. During his time of study, a plague hit and Oxford was emptied out of all people. He spent 18 months in the country. That 18 months would change the world.

Newton was thinking about astronomy. He was sitting under an apple tree trying to figure out why the moon kept in orbit around the earth and not fall into it. In one of those apocryphal stories that is actually true, an apple fell from the tree. Newton's law of gravitational pull was born that day. He worked it out mathematically, but he didn't have his books and he had the circumference of the earth wrong.

During that 18 months, he also did a few other things. He figured out the three laws of motion. He invented the rudimentary calculus. He also studied prisms and the nature of light. Therefore, he invented optics, the science of light. All of this in 18 months in his early twenties.

When I think about this sort of thing, I think back about what I have accomplished in the last 18 months. Oy! Anyway, one important thing to know about Newton is that he was a deeply religious man. In fact, he wrote a lot more in theology than he did about math or science. This amazing man who shed so much light on the nature of the universe saw that God and only God can know why God set up the laws of the

universe. Man can know the laws, but only God knows the why of the laws.

Albert Einstein was an intellectual descendent of Newton's. He took Newton's work in physics and expanded them greatly. One of the beautiful things is that Newtonian physics fits perfectly inside Einsteinian physics. Einstein, like Newton, believed in God. He wrote famously, "God doesn't roll dice."

Another great scientist who is very much alive is Francis S. Collins. He headed up the human genome project. This was a monumental project that mapped out the human DNA molecule. Already, many scientific breakthroughs have happened because of it. Dr. Collins wrote a book called 'The Language of God' in which he reveals that he is not only a lead scientist in the world, but also a devout Christian. He says that there is absolutely no conflict in him between science and religion.

Why am I talking about these great scientists who were and are men of faith? Because the popular culture seems to think that you have to choose between science and religion. A man that I know who is a church guy lamented to me that his son has no interest in church. I asked him why. He quoted his son directly. The son said, "I believe in science."

The nub of this controversy is rooted in two sources, I think. We start with chapter one of the book of Genesis. God the Creator creates

the world including humans in six days. God takes the seventh day for rest. For literal readers of Scripture, the job of creation was done, complete.

Then in 1859, a scientist by the name of Charles Darwin, published a book called, 'The Origin of the Species.' This book contained information about Darwin witnessing the start of a new species of finch while on a research trip to the Galapagos Islands. This created a major problem for Bible believers who believe the six-day creation story. Bible believers thought that the job of creation was complete on the sixth day of creation and Darwin believers believe that creation is on-going. So, the debate ensued between the 'evolutionists' and the 'creationists.' That debate is still with us today.

I find that there is integrity in folks who are creationists. It is a lovely thing to have a strong faith and to hold to it in the face of scientific discovery that contradicts your belief system. These people have to endure ridicule from so many who do not believe as they do or are not believers. That is just not right. Creationists should be respected the same as evolutionists should be respected whether you agree with them or not.

The question is, 'Can you believe in the God of the Bible and still accept scientific discoveries that contradict the Bible stories?' The people who choose up sides will say, 'no.' I say, 'yes.' I read the Bible

daily. I don't read the Bible as a science book or a history book, although there are histories in the Bible.

I often think of the beautiful passage in the book of Job, when God bellows from the whirlwind, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Well, we were nowhere to be found so I read the Bible humbly. I have also done enough research on the Bible to know that reading it literally can get you into trouble.

Instead of scientific facts, I look for wisdom, truth, and lessons on how to live a good life in Scripture. I find those things on every page. By reading the Bible that way, it frees me up to accept the idea that as beautiful as the creation story is in Genesis, new species have been created and are still being created.

Also, I have read Darwin's, 'The Origin of the Species.' I cannot recommend that book highly enough. It is extremely well written and is very clear. It is certainly in the top ten books I've ever read.

This whole idea that you have to pick sides between creationism and evolution is distressing to me. On a personal level, the differences that I have theologically with the fundamentalist I know is manageable. We get past our differences with some good-natured ribbing.

On a societal level the problem is bigger. The either-or folks seem to fill the debate with rancor. It is like our political situation these days.

When people are polarized, it gets ugly. There are plenty of people who as a matter of policy will not discuss religion or politics.

This is a deeply unfortunate thing. This polarization denies us the ability to learn from each other, to give the other person the opportunity to make their case without being treated with contempt. We need only remember that some of the greatest scientists in history, including Newton, Einstein, Collins, and yes, Darwin were men who believed in God, albeit with very different notions of God.

When people feel that they have to choose between religion and science, are denying themselves. People who pick religion deny themselves the appreciation of the marvelous discovery that science has brought us. People who choose science deny themselves the peace to be found in the feeling of the divine presence.

My prayer is for all of us to be more tolerant of divergent views, no matter what the topic. If we start with basic respect for others, whether it be of different religious views, political views, ethnic group, race, gender, sexual orientation we can start to move in a direction that brings us together rather than drive us apart. AMEN