



A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture

Keith A. Mathison, R.C. Sproul (Foreword)

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In A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture, Dr. Keith Mathison tackles a topic that has long been a subject of debate, aiming to enable believers to approach questions pertaining to science and Scripture with grace, humility, and patience.

A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture Details

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From Reader Review A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture for online ebook

Christopher Brehm says

I thought this was a good introduction to the topic if you are unfamiliar with the subject. It was oddly written as a commentary on a speech given by Dr. Sproul in 2012. I think if this book were to be expanded to include discussion on many of the ongoing discussions beyond the age of the universe, that would be very helpful.

Adam Calvert says

A pretty short book with the main argument that both natural *and* supernatural revelation are infallible. The interpreters of either form of revelation, however, are not.

It's a great thought. I don't know that it's new, but maybe the way it was presented was new.

Basically, the book is a recap (and elaboration) on what R.C. Sproul said at some conference. In general it kind of reads like a high school (or maybe early college) paper. I mean no offense to the author of course; but that's just how it reads - with the basic formula of: Sproul said this at the conference. This means x. Next chapter: Sproul also said this, and this means y.

Conclusion: I liked the Biblical idea. But I wonder if just listening to Sproul's presentation at the conference or just reading the manuscript (a portion if not the entire thing being the introduction to the book) would be enough.

David says

This short e-book gives an overview the Reformed view of truth and applies that to how we understand science. It re-affirms that "all truth is God's truth", and that as Christians, we don't need to be afraid of scientific truth. Any truth, now matter its source, will point us to God.

The problem comes in when we confuse what revelation (special or general) actually says with our interpretation of that revelation. If a claim of science conflicts with a claim of scripture, what are we to do? We need to remember that we are fallible human beings, and this affects theologians and scientists alike. Therefore, it is possible that the scientist is wrong and the theologian is right. It is also possible that the theologian is wrong and the scientist is right. We need to approach claims of truth with wise humility.

Whether the reader is Reformed or not, I think this is a good introduction to a proper understanding of how science and the scriptures are to be understood in light of one another.

Scott Roper says

This is a short, basic book that argues for what should be elementary: all truth is God's truth. More applicably, Keith Mathison argues that theologians can misinterpret Scripture just as scientists can misinterpret nature.

Because it is introductory, the author does not get into the questions of epistemology raised throughout. One illustration of this is in chapter 7 where he argues that only if Christ is not risen from the dead is our faith in vain. Besides limiting Paul's meaning (he didn't say "only") and possibly contradicting himself (is this the only thing that Scripture "actually" teaches?), what is one to do with this? If Christ's body was produced, does this mean that we are to conclude our faith is in vain? Or does the priority of Scripture that Mathison has established mean that we conclude that the Scriptures don't "actually" teach Christ's resurrection? Doesn't this completely undermine the force of the apostle's hypothetical?

I would like to see these sorts of questions addressed, but I understand that it is beyond this book's scope. This reader was left with an overly skeptical approach to Scripture where the content of what is "actually" taught is unknowable. As it stands, this book might be helpful for those who tend to equate a tentative interpretation, whether of Scripture or nature, with truth itself.

Patrick says

Excellent. In this day and age with all the scientific findings that are around it is good to take a step back. God has revealed Himself to man in two ways, general and special revelation. Both are infallible. This means that general revelation cannot contradict special revelation and vice versa. This short book does an excellent job at warning Christians on the dangers of taking an interpretation of Scripture over scientific fact. Conversely it is impossible to believe scientific theory that is in direct conflict over what the Scripture actually teaches. The two must be compatible as both are infallible revelation of God. This gives me pause and grants me caution as to what I dogmatically assert the Scriptures to "plainly teach". Thanks to the author of this short book and to R.C. Sproul

Andy says

I found this to be disappointing on many levels. First of all, it was merely a commentary on a lecture by R.C. Sproul. Not that this is a problem. But it was more like reading a review of someone else's work. Secondly, there was no actual "approach" advocated. There was a lot of dancing around issues. Perhaps "that" is the aforementioned approach. Thirdly, the word "science" in the title is far too general. The only issue the book was addressing is the age of the universe. It was not advocating any position on that either. So, when all was said and done, we have a second hand report of a lecture in which the speaker danced around the question of the Reformed position on the age of the universe.

Ronny Fallas says

Too short, an expanded review of Sproul's answer. I expected at least some Scriptural considerations on why

there are some valid positions on either side, and which one with certainty can be dismissed.

Donald says

Generally insightful. More of a wise approach to look at the conversation of creation. It basically covers RC Sproul's comments on the idea with just a bit of logical investigation. Quick read.

Frank Peters says

This is an excellent little booklet, which shows how one can deal with debates about origins while remaining faithful to a high view of scripture. The authors are very careful not to be dogmatic about issues that cannot be fully known. While not all Christians come from a reformed background, I believe that all would benefit from this booklet.

Jesse Larson says

A very interesting read that helped temper my thoughts on the subject. Would have been nice to reference someone other than Sproul all the time, it made it feel a little one sided. This had potential to be a good book but ended up being little more than a long winded paraphrasing of someone else's thoughts.

Josiah says

One of the challenges of picking up an e-book is that you're not quite sure how long it's going to be. So as someone who came into this book expecting at least a couple hundred page long investigation of the relationship of science and Scripture, discovering that this was only a fifty-page barely-not-a-pamphlet was disappointing.

Such is life, though. It's best to judge something on its own merits and not by what you had expected it to be. The only problem is, there's not much here. This book straddles an awkward position of being neither a short pithy blog post on the subject nor a long detailed look at it, which makes it hard to determine exactly what the book's purpose is and who its targeted audience is. Complicating things even further is the fact that this book is essentially just a long commentary on a statement that R.C. Sproul gave during some conference, meaning that it's really just a longer version of what Sproul said in a much pithier and compact way. Yeah, some explanation on some points is nice. But I don't think that really justifies the existence of a whole book on it.

All-in-all, this isn't a bad book about how to integrate science with Scripture. It did have a couple original insights that I found helpful. But you're probably best served by reading other blog posts or books on this topic which are more appropriate to your level of research interest than by picking up this ebook.

Rating: 2.5 Stars (Okay).

Clark Goble says

Essentially, this little book is a commentary on a statement made by theologian R.C. Sproul. It serves somewhat as a guide for scientists and theologians to come to terms when disagreements arise. The basic argument of the book is as follows:

1. All truth is God's truth.
2. God reveals truth in two ways - General Revelation (nature/science) and Special Revelation (Word of God).
3. Both General and Special Revelation are infallible, however, they are both subject at times to fallible interpretations.
4. If a conflict between science and the Bible arises, it can only be one of three things - the scientist holds a flawed interpretation of his data, the theologian holds a flawed interpretation of Scripture, or both are wrong.

Mathison reminds the reader of the historical view of geocentrism and that many theologians (Calvin and Luther specifically) clung to a flawed interpretation of Scripture despite Copernicus proving them wrong. As such, it is possible for science, while interpreting infallible general revelation, to inform and educate the theologian. This point is made to argue for a generous relationship between science and theology. Too often, theologians assume the scientist is wrong while the scientist assumes the theologian is wrong - in reality, both scenarios are possible.

The author does remind the reader that in cases where science seems to directly contradict God's Word, it is God's Word that gets the nod. However, the theologian must be sure of his interpretation before taking a stand.

I would have rated this little book higher has the author applied its principles to the argument over evolution. Rather, Mathison applies his principals to the age of the universe. It was interesting, but it left me wanting more. It does, however, serve as a decent introduction to the subject of science and religion.

John Yelverton says

The author makes one good point, which is that we need to make sure that we don't misinterpret God's special revelation and then use that misinterpretation to misinterpret God's natural revelation. Unfortunately, that's the author's only point, and he hammers it chapter after chapter without building on it or moving on from it.

Chris Little says

A good thing about buying a book that really is a book is that you get a sense of what kind of book it wants to be. A 600 page treatment is a different beast from an 80 page piece - neither is necessarily better, but the aims will differ.

With an ebook, this is harder. And, perhaps, easier to be disappointed. 'I thought this was going to be in-

depth, but it's only a brief guide.' Or, 'I just wanted something simple, not the history of the universe.'

So let's explain the intangibles of this book. *A Reformed Approach to Science and Scripture* is a big title, huge. Science! Scripture! Reformed! Wow. Yet it's not broad, deep, and exhaustive. It is a short work, so does not aim to cover all things.

Even more important, it's not even really trying to be a reformed introduction to the philosophy of science. (Which I thought it might be - my mistake.) Instead, it is an expansion on some comments made by R.C. Sproul. At a conference, Sproul was answering the question, 'How old is the universe?'

Sproul's answer is wonderful. He did not merely indicate young or old, but in a few sentences touched on science, Christianity, and the relation between them.

The answer is quoted in full (tidied up a little for publication purposes). Sproul notes some of the issues:

- * The Bible does not state how old the earth is, but some hints suggest it's young
- * Science has plenty to say that is relevant: expanding universe, astronomical dating, etc
- * All truth is God's truth, scripture and nature
- * God's revelation in scripture is infallible **as also** God's revelation in nature is infallible
- * We know times when natural revelation has corrected the church's understanding of special revelation
- * Nonetheless, that which is definitively taught in the Bible is never overthrown by science
- * That is, scientists can be wrong, theologians can be wrong, and we privilege neither
- * In conclusion: 'I don't know how old the earth is.'

This book by Mathison expands on these points. It has some theological points (eg, Augustine, Aquinas). It has some history (eg, Calvin and Luther on the geocentrism). It does not have much science or philosophy of science.

The crux of the book - and of Sproul's answer - is the double infallibility of God's double revelation, special and natural. This is, I think, both the strength and the weakness of the book's argument.

It is strong, because it highlights the unity of all truth in God. Let God be true, though all men be liars (Romans 3:4). The saying catches it nicely: all truth is God's truth.

Yet there are problems with the book's argument. I think these are in the theological terminology used, as well as it's application in the book. Imprecision is introduced: it does no real damage to this book's argument, because it has a narrow focus. But such imprecision is problematic if it flows through the (huge) scope of science-theology understanding.

The problem: Mathison persists in speaking of **natural revelation**, when I think he would do better to speak of **truth**.

In speaking of natural revelation, Mathison has in mind the knowledge of God accessible to all humans through creation. As Romans 1:19-21 indicates, this knowledge is *about God*, and it makes us *without excuse*, because natural revelation *cannot save*. He helpfully quotes and alludes to Romans 1.

But the book then slides from this knowledge *about God* to science, without any reason put forward for the connection. Yet it is not evident that knowing more about the planets' arrangement adds anything to natural revelation. We know more truth, certainly, but no more about God.

In other words, Mathison makes no convincing argument that the theological category of natural revelation also applies to science.

This imprecision has other effects. I note just one - the use of infallible.

Mathison return more than once to a group of seminarians asked two questions by Sproul.

"How many of you believe that God's revelation in Scripture is infallible?" They all raised their hands. I then asked, "And how many of you believe that God's revelation in nature is infallible?" No one raised his hand. It's the same God giving the revelation.

Two helpful and provocative questions to put! Natural revelation is, indeed, infallible - *it does not fail* but achieves its purpose. The purposes of natural revelation succeed: people of faith praise the Lord (Psalm 19:1), and rebels against God find they have no excuse (Romans 1:20).

Infallibility is a term of theology, and relates to God's purposes in his revelation. But Mathison, having assumed a tight link between natural revelation and science, has thereby partly imported infallibility into science, where it does not belong.

Now, that's a long discussion about being precise in terminology. So let me emphasise this: I think this work well worth reading. Have a read, think well, and thank God that all truth is his.

Ryan says

This was a wonderful but short book on a Reformed approach to science and Scripture. Since God is the fountainhead of all truth, then all truth is God's truth. This means that natural revelation and special revelation are both infallible because they both spring from God. What is fallible, however, is our interpretation to each of them (either our interpretation of the Bible or our scientific theories). There were a lot of quotes from Reformed teachers (Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Aquinas, Hodge, etc.), demonstrating that Scripture and science are not at odds with one another—even though our interpretations of either may be.

The only thing I disliked about the book is that Mathieson begins almost each chapter by quoting a response from Dr. Sproul that he gave at a national conference in 2012. While Dr. Sproul's answer was full of wisdom and practical insight into the nature of science and Scripture, it felt like more of a teaching based off his answer than rooted in Scripture or history. It was in fact rooted in both, but I would have loved to see the chapters springboard from older Reformed teachers, and then maybe tie in Dr. Sproul's answer there. But nevertheless, it was a helpful little book to see that Scripture and science are not at odds with each other.
