

CHAPTER 13

BUT WHAT ABOUT . . . ?

THE NEXT HOT ISSUES

The issues of origins we've discussed in this book are by no means the only place where science and Christianity intersect. Advances in medicine have led to increasingly complex questions in bioethics about both the beginning and the end of life. Advances in stem cell research are often in the news. Increasing evidence for global warming raises urgent questions about sustainable use of the environment. What will be the big issue in ten or thirty years? Artificial intelligence? Life on other planets? Behavior and brain chemistry?

The church frequently has been slow to respond about scientific issues, letting other voices set the agenda and propose solutions. Christians ought to be thinking ahead and taking the lead in addressing these questions. If God is calling you to be a leader in the church on one of these issues, we offer some general guidelines for approaching them.

- ▶ Learn the strengths and weaknesses of several positions. What views are out there already? By listening to a wide range of voices, including ones you disagree with, you will gain a better understanding of all aspects of the issue.
- ▶ Examine the claims. Don't let people on any side of the debate get away with making assertions without supporting them. Be just as careful in examining the assertions of people who agree with you as you are in examining the claims of people who disagree with you. Is there enough evidence in nature and in Scripture to back up the assertion? Is resistance rooted in false assumptions or clear argument?
- ▶ Use good principles of biblical interpretation for understanding relevant Bible passages. Look for the literary and historical context of the passage and consider what it meant to the first audience. Does that original meaning have relevance for the issue today? In what way?
- ▶ Look for the broad theological context. Modern issues raised by science are rarely addressed directly in Scripture, so look for the underlying theological themes that are as true today as when the Scripture was written. Are the theological themes you use at the core of Christian belief, or is this a "disputable matter" (Rom. 14:1) in which Christians might agree to disagree?
- ▶ Look for the broad scientific context. In addition to the science relevant to the particular issue, learn something about the scientific discipline as a whole. For example, if you are studying bioethics, spend some time learning the basics of human development from a standard biology textbook rather than just learning the science from those making their ethical case. Keep an eye out for which scientific results seem to have

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This article is part of a collection associated with the book *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*.

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long-standing consensus of support in the scientific community and which issues are still debated among scientists or lack extensive testing.

- ▶ Don't let science or biblical interpretation be hijacked by worldviews and politics. When listening to different viewpoints, try to disentangle the scientific or biblical interpretation argument from the larger agenda of the speaker. Check whether the argument stands up on its own, or if it rests upon some unstated worldview assumption.