

August 1, 2010

Gleanings

Driven by the Science



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After nearly three months, BP finally may have capped the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. To be sure that the well is capped and the hydrocarbons are not simply leaking out someplace else, the situation is being closely observed. Officials with BP are working with the national incident commander for the Deepwater Horizon disaster, retired U.S. Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen, to provide the requisite monitoring.

Shortly after the well was capped, Admiral Allen stated: "While we are pleased that no oil is currently being released into the Gulf of Mexico and want to take all appropriate action to keep it that way, it is important that all decisions are driven by the science."

(Source: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704201604575372892967720922.html?KEYWORDS=Admiral+Allen#project%3DSLIDESHOW08%26s%3DSB10001424052748704196404575375651598810696%26articleTabs%3Darticle>)

What does Admiral Allen mean by the phrase "all decisions are driven by the science"? If by this he means that his interpretation of reality is limited to the physical realm, then he is thinking as a naturalist or deist.

In last month's newsletter, I defined these terms, but as a reminder I will do so again. A *naturalist* believes that there is no reality other than physical reality, which means that naturalists tend to be atheists. A *deist* is one who believes God is the Creator of the universe, but believes that God is largely disconnected from the universe and does not intervene in the affairs of men. Therefore, though technically different worldviews, in practice, naturalists and deists are virtually the same since both seek to explain all events of life based on physical reality. Therefore they are "driven by the science."

Having been trained as a scientist, I appreciate sound physical data, proven theory, well-conceived analysis of the data based on theory, and reasoned conclusions. However, if God created the universe and intervenes in His universe, then naturalism and deism are at best incomplete and at worst wrong.

A biblical worldview presents a God who is actively involved in His creation. There have been times in history when the only plausible explanation for events was God's intervention. Just a few examples would be Creation (note that the theory of evolution offers no explanation for the "Big Bang"), the Flood, the parting of the Red Sea, the sun standing still for a day, turning water into wine, multiplying food, and the resurrection from the dead. I realize that some people seek to explain these events naturally or dismiss them as myths, but these attempts are largely unpersuasive and are generally advanced by people with an atheistic and/or agnostic presupposition.

If you concede that the Creator of the universe does intervene in the affairs of men, it would seem wise to not limit one's perspective to the physical realm. As a scientist I was trained to consider all options when seeking to explain physical phenomena. Hence, to disregard the spiritual dimension and therefore limit one's perspective to the physical realm is to *a priori* eliminate some options. A scientist who is truly open-minded—one with a biblical worldview—would therefore consider both the physical and spiritual dimensions in investigating any situation. Hence, in analyzing the Deepwater Horizon disaster, a true scientist would certainly examine the physical data carefully, but he would also consider what God is saying and doing in and through the situation.

God granted mankind the ability to operate with a level of success in the physical realm and to respond to physical events with some efficacy. This is true even of those people who reject God. Theologians call this "common grace." For example, the Deepwater Horizon leak appears to have been stopped by means of sound physical analysis and action. But gnawing questions remain. Why did this happen? What is the real root issue? How can we prevent this from happening again? Why weren't we prepared? What is the long-term impact of millions of barrels of oil and gas released into the ocean? How should we go about cleaning up the disaster? What role, if any, did God play in this disaster? A true scientist is not content until he finds answers to all the relevant questions of any situation.

To answer all of these questions one must go beyond the physical realm. It appears that people working based on a naturalistic or deistic worldview successfully stopped the leak—at least for now. But they don't appear to have answers to all the questions.

A biblical analysis of any situation seeks to find the root issue. God—a spirit being—created the physical universe. This suggests that the physical emanates from the spiritual. In other words, physical reality is simply the manifestation of underlying spiritual reality. Remember that the sin of pride in the hearts of Adam and Eve (spirituality reality) was manifested by disobedience (physical reality) (see Genesis 3). This is the reason that the world does not enjoy the benefits of a perfect “Garden of Eden” environment. So when things go wrong in the physical world, there must be some underlying sin in the spiritual realm.

If you concede that sin is the root issue, then how is sin at work in the Deepwater Horizon incident?

There are two options to consider. First, by virtue of the fall of man (see Genesis 3), sin has impacted the physical universe, which is the reason for physical imperfections and spurious events. The apostle Paul alluded to this reality in the book of Romans (see Romans 8:19ff). And second, by virtue of the fall of man, sin is systemic in the nature of man, that is, man is by nature biased toward sin. Theologians call this depravity. That the nature of man is a state of depravity from birth seems to be the testimony of Scripture (See Romans 3:23).

The impact of sin on our world results in unexplained and unexpected events. It is wisdom to understand, expect, and prepare for unforeseen events, particularly when working in areas where we know little and can control little, such as drilling in deep waters. Wise industry leaders and public officials should then seek to be prepared for these unforeseen risks. For example, it would be wise for all oil drillers to set aside financial reserves and public policy leaders to develop a sound policy for high-risk exploration.

With regard to the human condition, sin in the heart of man will be manifest in the behavior of man. For example, suppose that BP was greedy for money and willing to compromise safety for the perceived opportunity to make more money faster. If this is true, BP probably developed a culture based on a worldview driven by the principle that the opportunity to make money is more important than values such as safety. When money is the driver in an organization, it is tantamount to the worship of money. Biblically, we know that this will not be blessed because we cannot worship God and money (see Luke 16:13). So if BP's management team chooses to worship money, then BP will suffer the judgment for violating God's principles (see Luke 12:13–31). Wise public officials should recognize the error of BP's management philosophy and enact laws to protect the public from BP's self-centered mammon worshipping sin and the judgment of God that will inevitably be exacted on BP (see Psalms 1).

But beyond the impact of sin on the material universe and mankind is the issue of divine intervention. For example, as described in the Old Testament, God intervened in the economic and political affairs of Israel when they rejected Him and chose to worship idols. In other words, Israel abandoned God's values and principles and adopted the ways of the world, both of which were counter to the will and ways of God.

Are we not doing the same thing today? Consider the attempts to redefine marriage and family contrary to the Bible, the legalization of biblically illicit human relationships, the legalization of murder by means of abortion, the rejection of God in our education and public policy, the disdain for public prayer, the bias against Christ in any public setting, etc. I think one could easily argue that, as a maxim, there is a worldwide wholesale rejection of God in virtually all of life.

If the world today is choosing to reject God just as Israel did, is it possible that God would intervene as He has in the past? Would God exact economic and political judgment on people who are rejecting Him? Dealing with this question requires more than a naturalistic or deistic worldview, it requires a biblical worldview.

Being “driven by the science” understood from a naturalist or deist worldview is not adequate—it is at best an incomplete worldview and therefore does not lead to a comprehensive view of truth.

Pragmatically, naturalism and deism have some value. In the case of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, science helped stop the leak. Wonderful! We needed to do that. But we must go beyond that—we need to understand why this happened, not so that we can find and punish a scapegoat, but so that we can learn the lessons and not repeat the mistake; so that we can understand what God is saying through this situation and respond appropriately.

We have paid a big price because of this catastrophe, so let's learn all that we are supposed to learn. We can only do that by embracing a biblical worldview that looks at both tangible (physical) and intangible (spiritual) reality to understand the root issues.

People who embrace a biblical worldview need to have a voice in the conversation about this incident. We cannot allow the naturalists and deists solely to interpret this situation. If we do, the cost will be high; they will not interpret it biblically and are not looking to God and therefore will miss what God is saying in and through the situation. Only people who embrace a biblical worldview can bring the correct and complete assessment to this situation. These are the real scientists who can and must drive us to the whole truth.



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