

“WHERE FAITH AND SCIENCE MEET (#5):
‘NEW SCIENCE’ AND THE FUTURE OF FAITH”

(Romans 1:19-20a)

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[PROPS NEEDED: (1) “Mad Scientist” Video; (2) Fractals Video Clip]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 2-7-10]

-I-

1. **[Traditional Service ONLY:]** Read Text: Romans 1:19-20a and Pray.
2. **[VIDEO INTRODUCTION BY “MAD SCIENTIST” LUDWIG VON NEBUCHADNEZZAR:**
“Does Faith Have A Future?” (Time:3:00)]

A—So what do we make of Dr. Ludwig’s dilemma? I mean, in today’s world of reason and science, is religious faith (like dandruff) something that many of us have but that we need to get rid of? ¹ Or instead, do we need it more *now* than at any other time in history?

B—Well, this is the question we’ll be wrestling with today as we wrap up our series Where Faith and Science Meet by looking at the future of faith in a world of science.
(Read bulletin Sermon Notes...)

3. To do that, we first need to recognize that there *are* those who believe that science has made (or will soon make) religious faith obsolete, seeing it merely as an embarrassing relic of a superstitious past, and that a truly enlightened society will rid itself of religion altogether. ²

A—For example, 100 years ago Sigmund Freud wrote that *“The more the fruits of knowledge become accessible,...the more widespread [will be] the decline of religious belief.”* ³

B—More recently, biologist Richard Dawkins (author of The God Delusion) said that *“Faith is one of the world’s great evils, comparable to smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Faith, being belief that isn’t based on evidence, is the principle vice of religion....”* ⁴

4. But is the “death” of faith really the *only* possible outcome of continued scientific discovery and progress? ⁵

-II-

5. Well, I (and many others) don’t think so. To the contrary: I believe that, far from *exterminating* faith, the discoveries and progress of science may actually serve to propel us *towards* an even *greater* need for, and belief in, religious faith.

A—Now, why do I say this? Well, we’ve learned throughout this series that faith and science are not *rival*, but *complementary* ways of viewing life and reality. ⁶

B—So then, even if the progress of science helps us answer more and more “how” questions of life, why would we think that that eliminates either the *existence* of or the *need* for basic answers about “why” (e.g., about ultimate purpose and meaning)?

6. Take a pot of water boiling on a stove, for instance.

A—Let's say I ask the question "*Why is it boiling?*"

1—"Molecular science" would say that it's because H₂O molecules have heated up to the point where they've changed into a gas and are starting to be released as steam.

2—"Mechanical science" would say it's because someone applied kinetic energy by turning the gas knob on the stove to the "on" position.

3—But at its most basic level, someone else (who may not even be a scientist) might say, "*It's boiling because I wanted some coffee!*"⁷

B—Now which of these is the more "correct" answer? Well, they're *all* correct in some sense!

1—And my point is that just because science can give us *scientific* explanations about the origins and processes of our universe, of life on earth, or of our human body,...

2—...Those explanations do *NOT* eliminate our need for, or the validity of, *philosophical and theological* explanations about the purpose and meaning of these origins, or the fact that we all came from a loving Creator in the first place!⁸

7. Now, I don't want to get too technical, but to reinforce what's I'm describing, I want us to look at three more concrete examples to see how some of the most recent ideas of what's come to be called "*New Science*"⁹ merely point us towards further faith in God.¹⁰

—III—

8. One area that's drawn a lot of attention over the last few years is **GENETICS**, including the idea that religious faith and belief in God might actually be the result of our genetic makeup.

A—This idea was first proposed by geneticist Dean Hamer in his 2004 book The God Gene, and while it's not without controversy even in the scientific community, it's an interesting proposal to say that faith and belief in God is the result of nothing more than genetics.¹¹

B—And yet (thinking of our boiling water analogy), could it be that, far from explaining *away* religious faith, Hamer's proposal merely uncovers the science *behind* what the Bible has been saying all along?...that as human beings we are made for faith and for a relationship with God our heavenly Father?¹²

C—C.S. Lewis believed this kind of logic to be one of the "proofs" of God's existence, saying that people don't usually yearn for things that don't exist:

1—We yearn for *food* because there is such a thing called "food" that we can eat;

2—We yearn for *love* because it's possible to love and be loved;

3—And so, he would say, our yearnings for something outside ourselves (whether called "God" or not) are "evidence" of the fact that God actually exists.¹³

4—And a "God-Gene" (if it exists) merely explains *how* we hunger for God.¹⁴

9. Another example from “New Science” is something called “**CHAOS THEORY**,” which says that the random-ness (or “chaos”) of our natural world and universe is not so random at all, but instead is the product of mathematically repetitive patterns called “fractals.”¹⁵

A–Now that sounds complicated, but we all see fractals every day: [BEGIN FRACTAL VIDEO CLIP...] the clouds in the sky; fern leaves; the heads of broccoli; the “random” patterns generated on a computer screen saver, or by lasers at the Stone Mountain Laser Show (if you’ve ever been), and even the patterns that you’re seeing on the media screen right now.

B–Fractals show that “randomness” & “chance” can be artificially/mathematically created. So here’s the question: if we as *human beings* can create beauty out of “chance” in this way, then why not God?

1–Physicist Ian Barbour says that “*What appears to be chance – which atheists take as an argument against [the existence of God]– may be the very point at which God acts.*”¹⁶

2–In other words, far from disproving the existence of God, Chaos Theory demonstrates that concepts like “chance” and “random /natural selection” may not only point to the *existence* of God,...

3–... but may again merely *uncover* some of the “tools” that God *uses* as Creator (whether for the creation of the universe or of human life itself).¹⁷
[STOP FRACTAL MOVIE CLIP if not already finished...]

10. A final “New Science” concept I’d like to mention today is **QUANTUM PHYSICS**, which basically says that everything is related and in relationship with everything else through particles too small to see or observe, ...

A–...But that we should nevertheless accept the reality of their *existence* merely because we can measure their effects – makes sense, right?

B–Well, help me out if I’m missing something here, but isn’t that the same logic that theologians have been using for thousands of years? ...that the “intangibles” of the spiritual world (things like hope, love, joy, purpose/meaning, and even faith itself) may not be empirically measurable, but we nevertheless know they exist *because* we can see and observe their effects in people’s lives?

C–In other words, by demanding a kind of “faith” in science, Quantum Physics, far from eliminating the existence of religious faith, actually “proves” that it exists!¹⁸

–IV–

11. Now, I know that what I’ve shared may be over-simplifications, and that there are other concepts of “New Science” that can also deepen our understanding and need for faith.¹⁹

A–But I hope you see that even just these three affirm that explanations of “HOW” do *not* negate explanations about “WHY,” and instead merely serve to *deepen* them.²⁰

B–In fact, that’s precisely what we find in today’s scripture from Romans 1:19-20:
(MSG) “*The basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes ... can’t see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being.*”

(NRSV) “*What can be known about God is plain... because God has shown it... Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature ... have been understood and seen through the things he has made.*”

C–In other words, all that *was*, all that *is*, and all that *will be* exists to point us to God, and to an ongoing, vital relationship with Him.

D–And that means that there’s absolutely nothing wrong with being a person of faith *and* of science – or for that matter, of being (as today’s scripture implies) a person who *finds* faith *through* science.²¹

–V–

11. So then, let’s get back to our original question: Is religious faith on its death-bed (as some claim) because of the findings of science and reason? Absolutely not!

A–To the contrary: the future of faith is perhaps stronger than ever, because the more we discover, and the more scientific progress we make,...

B–...The more we uncover a need for things that science *alone* can’t give us – things like hope, joy, love, peace, purpose/meaning.

C–These are what God created faith to supply, and they’re precisely why faith and science are *complements* to each other (not *rivals*).

D–And I believe that when we finally discover the places “*Where Faith and Science Meet*,” it’s *there* that we will find God Himself welcoming us!

12. [PRAYER: “*O God, all that you created is meant to point us towards you: ...the stars in the heavens; the cells in our bodies; our longing and yearning for meaning and purpose to life; and even love that we experience with and among others. And you even created us with minds to seek out, uncover, and discover the science behind these things. In the words of one of your children (Albert Einstein), let us “Never lose a holy curiosity.” So, thank you for ‘holy curiosity,’ like that of Thomas in the New Testament – a curiosity which spurs us to seek you not only with all our heart, soul, and strength, but also – like Thomas – with our mind. And let the findings of our curiosity not become a substitute for you, but merely tools that point us towards you, and leading us into a vital, vibrant ongoing relationship with you. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*”]

ENDNOTES:

1. The quote Dr. Ludwig read in the video clip was written by science fiction writer Robert Heinlein, “*Religion is a crutch for people not strong enough to stand up to the unknown without help. But, like dandruff, most people do have a religion and spend time and money on it and seem to derive considerable pleasure from fiddling with it*” [Heinlein, in his work Notebooks of Lazarus Long, cited at Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 20].

2. As early as 475 BC, the Greek philosopher Anaxagorus wrote that “*Everything has a natural explanation,*” leading him to argue that one day society would be free of religion altogether [Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 61].

3. Freud, cited in Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 64. Physicist Ian Barbour further explained Freud’s beliefs when he said that “*Sigmund Freud held that religious beliefs are a product of wishful thinking... an evasion of reality and a regression to childhood in the search for security in a hostile world*” [Ian G. Barbour, explaining the beliefs of Freud in When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 154].

4. Richard Dawkins, “*Is Science A Religion?*” The Humanist 56 (Jan/Febr 1997), pp. 26-27, cited in Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 155. In another place Dawkins writes that “*Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence*” [Dawkins, cited in Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 21]. Read more about Dawkins’ views at his website www.richarddawkins.net, or in his books The God Delusion and The Selfish Gene.

Other authors with similarly harsh views of religion include: American rationalist Paul Keller, who wrote that “*Faith is a euphemism for prejudice and religion is a euphemism for superstition*” (Poling, p.18); Thomas Paine (author of Common Sense) who wrote, “*The study of theology, as it stands in the Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authority; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and it admits of no conclusion*” (Poling, p. 18); and Sam Davis throughout his book The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason (WWNorton & Co. 2004). Today’s dilemma is summarized as follows: “*For many people, science has sounded the death knell for God. It has shown that God probably doesn’t exist, because all the things we previously used God to explain can now be understood as produced by natural processes rather than an all-powerful deity. Even if God does exist, he’s [an] irrelevant bystander in the cosmic order...*” (Poling, p. 17).

5. The majority of science fiction movies and shows today (like Star Trek) presume this to be the case – that scientific progress will result in a future society that is “free” of the “superstitions” of religious faith.

6. In classical Thomistic theology (so called because it was first proposed by medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas), God is the *primary cause* who works through the *secondary causes* that science studies. To learn more about this, read Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 155.

7. This analogy was shared by guest lecturer John Haught, as heard on National Public Radio’s program “*The Science of Religion*” (January 17, 2010). His point is that just because science can tell us the “how” of our universe or world doesn’t eliminate our need to know its purpose and meaning (its “why”) – that scientific discoveries don’t replace our human need for religious faith. In other words, just because we *can*

explain something scientifically doesn't mean that that's the *only* way to explain its existence. "*Analysis in terms of intentions does not preclude analysis in terms of scientific laws.... Reference to divine intentions does not exclude a scientific account of casual sequences*" [Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 162].

8. Using this same line of reasoning, in his book God and the New Physics, Paul Davies says that "*Everything and every event in the physical universe must depend for its explanation on something outside itself. When a phenomenon is explained, it is explained in terms of something else. But if the phenomenon is all of existence and the entire physical universe then clearly there is nothing physical outside the universe (by definition) to explain it. So any explanation must be in terms of something non-physical and supernatural. That something is God. The universe is the way it is because God has chosen it to be that way. Science, which by definition deals only with the physical universe, might successfully explain one thing in terms of another, and that in terms of another and so on, but the totality of physical things demands an explanation from without*" [Davis, cited in Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 66]. In other words, though science can explain the details of "How" (mechanics and utility), questions of "Why" (ultimate meaning) about those mechanics can only be answered by non-mechanical (i.e., faith-related) references.

9. The phrase "New Science" refers to numerous scientific concepts and ideas that are not yet universally accepted, but are certainly on the "cutting edge" of scientific thought, and are becoming increasingly accepted as "fact" not only by the scientific community, but also by large portions of society, in general.

10. At the very least, they don't threaten (let alone *eliminate*) the need for religious faith.

11. Dean Hamer, The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes (Doubleday, 2004). It's basic premise is the idea that, over the course of evolution, "survival of the fittest" meant that those humans who had a gene that helped them have hope in a higher being (a god) were better at surviving than those who did not have it, allowing those with this "God-gene" to survive while others who didn't have it didn't survive, leaving humans today with a hard-wired /"innate need" for God. Hamer's proposal was shared more popularly in the October 25, 2004 Time magazine cover article, "The God Gene: Does our DNA Compel Us to Seek A Higher Power?"

12. Consider, for example, Acts 17:24-27 which speaks of God's creation of all things "*...so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him*" (Vs. 27). Also consider the words of Saint Augustine, who famously said, "*We were made for you, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*"

13. How else can one explain that nearly every child at some point in their life begins to ask spiritual questions of some sort? Even children who aren't raised in religious homes or raised to believe in God at some point at least question whether or not there is a God. How else can one explain the fact that nearly all persons have *some* type of spiritual experience in life, even if we anchor it in things like poetry, art, music or something else that we may or may not call "God," but which certainly points to a reality outside themselves. Isn't this exactly what we'd expect from a God who created us to yearn for and seek out and have a desire for Himself?

Consider, too, that the Bible itself seems to support the idea of genetics as a conveyor of information about and desire for God, as Ian Barbour explains: "*The biblical concept of divine Word (logos) suggests an analogy taken from contemporary science. The communication of information [as found in logos theology] is an important concept in communication theory, computer networks, and the DNA in organisms. In each*

case communication requires selective response (decoding) and the interpretation of a message in a wider context.... [Likewise,] the biblical idea of the divine Word can be viewed as the communication of rational structure and meaning when the world is interpreted in a wider context” [Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000 p. 61].

14. Lewis says that humans don’t usually hunger or desire something that doesn’t actually exist. So, he would say, we humans have a yearning for eternal life and for a Creator because there is, in fact, a Maker after whom we can actually yearn. This makes Hamer’s “God-Gene” (if it exists at all) merely the tool that God uses to point us towards the one who “programmed” the DNA “software” inside us in the very beginning.

15. “Chaos Theory” says that nature is rarely the predictable, stable machine like John Newton (founder of modern science, and hence often called “Newtonian Science”) thought – that instead, it’s often continuously changing, constantly in flux, almost to the point of appearing to be pure chaos (hence the term “Chaos Theory”). However, this theory argues that even in the midst of the apparent randomness and “chaos,” there are patterns that appear when we look hard enough, patterns that can only be explained by some kind of coded, mathematical formula that shapes the nature and make up of certain things.

16. Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 170.

17. John Jefferson Davis says that, “*Far from being a threat to a biblical understanding of providence, chaos theory can be seen as a new avenue for appreciating both the limitations of human ability to predict the future and the complexity and richness of God’s creative power*” [John Jefferson Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 87]. Consider also the following statements from physicist Ian Barbour:

“Some scientists and philosophers impressed by the role of chance have been led to reject theism.... But one possible answer is to say that God really controls all the events that appear to us to be chance – whether in quantum uncertainties, evolutionary mutations, or the accidents of human history.... [The result is that] natural laws and chance may equally be instruments of God’s intentions” [Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000 p. 63].

“If design is identified with the general direction of growth toward complexity, life, and consciousness, then both law and chance can be part of the design” (Barbour, p. 165). This means that the existence of chance in nature and natural selection does not preclude the possibility that chance itself is a tool of God!

“While most quantum events occur by chance, God influences certain quantum events without violating the statistical laws of quantum physics.... [For example,] in the biological world activities at higher levels exert a top-down causal influence on low-level processes without violating low-level laws” (Barbour, pp. 171-172).

18. This is also why Richard Dawkins’ argument about the “blindness” of faith and the “rationality” of pure science is completely flawed. He and others consider religion to be a matter of “faith” and science as a matter of “reason.” But is it really true that religious faith is absent of reason, logic or common sense – is faith “blind”? And is science really as purely logical or rational as it claims? The answer is “NO” to both questions: On the one hand, far from being “blind,” Christian faith is actually based upon reason and evidence... evidence that may not be observable using the *scientific* method, but evidence nevertheless because it is “provable” and “observable” in our own personal *experience*. On the other hand, the science of Quantum Physics itself asks us to trust in the existence of certain realities at the quantum level that cannot

be seen or observed directly – in other words, science here insists on a kind of “blind faith.” In the end, therefore, not only is religious faith not “blind,” but science itself is not based purely on reason or logic either – *both* require a degree of “faith” in order to operate.

19. One such other “New Science” concept is called “**Dissipative Structure Theory.**” In traditional Newtonian Chemistry, when a chemical compound begins to lose energy and break down (to “dissipate”), the assumption has been that it is nearing its end of existence, and that once that dissipation is complete, that matter *ceases to exist altogether*. The “Dissipative Structure Theory” of contemporary chemistry, on the other hand, teaches that that is not the case, that the disorder of that compound’s “dissipation” can be the source of a new order, and that the struggle and the seeming end of one form of existence can actually be the beginning of a *new* form. We already experience this in nature, for example, when we prune our rose bushes or other plants – it may look like we’re killing them, but in fact through the pruning of the old, we are creating conditions that allow the new to come into being. Consider how this is similar to the concept of being “born again” that Jesus talks about in the Bible – that for something new to come, something old must die, that “*Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it*” (Matthew 10:39), and that 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*” Other “New Science” concepts that have theological counterparts include **Field Theory, String Theory, Biotechnology,** and others.

20. “*The message of humility implied by these scientific discoveries is deeply consistent with the message of faith. Humanity has a fundamental need of humility in the face of an Infinite God and vastness of the universe. The frontiers of science can, for a believer, truly become frontiers of faith*” [John Jefferson Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 177].

21. This is, in fact, the story of what some scholars have called “the most notoriously ‘scientific’ person in the Bible”: Thomas. Known to most of us as “Doubting Thomas” (Read John 20:24-29), his name is often today a synonym for skeptical people. While on the surface his story seems to be one of the “triumph” of faith over reason, on closer inspection we’ll see that Jesus actually offered him the quasi-scientific “proof” for which he was seeking (wanting to see and touch the nail scars in Jesus’ hands). What I believe this demonstrates is that if something physical/tangible (like scientific “proof”) is needed for a person to find genuine religious faith, then God is not afraid to offer it. Remember the words of Jeremiah 29:13-14, “*If you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord.*” (even if we are seeking Him through the discoveries and findings of science!)