"WHERE FAITH AND SCIENCE MEET (#5): 'NEW SCIENCE' AND THE FUTURE OF FAITH"
(Romans 1:19-20a)
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1. Read Text: Romans 1:19-20a and Pray.

2. Today, we’re wrapping up our series Where Faith and Science Meet in which we’ve been looking at the relationship between what are often thought of as two rival ways of understanding life in our world.

   A--And with the expansion of knowledge and technology that characterizes today’s world, the question is increasingly asked, “In a world of science and reason, what exactly IS the role and future of faith? ¹

   B--Well, to answer 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

   1--100 years ago, for example, Sigmund Freud wrote that "The more the fruits of knowledge become accessible,...the more widespread [will be] the decline of religious belief." ³

   2--And 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

3. And yet, are these really true? Put another way: is the "death" of faith really the only possible outcome of continued scientific progress and discovery? ⁵

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4. Well, I (and many others) don't think so. To the contrary: I believe that, far from exterminating or eliminating the need for faith, the discoveries and progress of science may actually propel us towards an even greater need for, and belief in it than at any other time in human history.

   A--Now, why do I say this? Well, again thinking about how we’ve learned throughout this series that faith and science are not rival, but complementary ways of viewing life and reality. ⁶
B--So, 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)?

5. 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 (maybe not even a scientist) might say, "It's boiling because I wanted some coffee!"

B--So, which of these is the more "correct" answer? Well, they're all correct in some sense, aren’t they?

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 of the fact that we all came from a loving Creator in the first place!

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

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7. One area that's drawn a lot of attention recently is GENETICS, including the idea that religious faith and belief in God might somehow 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 our desire for faith and belief in God is the result of nothing more than genetic coding within our makeup as humans.

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?
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

8. 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: 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).

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 seems to demonstrate that concepts like "chance" and "random/natural selection" may merely be some of the "tools" that God uses as Creator (whether for the creation of the universe or of human life itself). 17

9. 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 (things like quarks, "dark matter," etc.), ...

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, & 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
10. 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.  

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.  

B--In fact, that's precisely what we find in today's scripture from Romans 1:19-20:  

"What is known about God should be plain... because God made it plain.... Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities--God's eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made."

C--This is saying, in other words, that all that was, all that is, and all that will be exists to point us TO God, and TO an ongoing, vital relationship WITH God.

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.  

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).

12. 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!

13. [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 the 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, leading us into a vital, vibrant ongoing relationship with you. In Jesus name we pray, Amen."]
ENDNOTES:

1 Science fiction author Robert Heinlein once wrote, "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].


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 (WW Norton & 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.
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].

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.

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.

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

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?"

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."
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].

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 who 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.

"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 random-ness 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.


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).
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.

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 the 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.

"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].

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 the 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!)