

God Wants All to Be Saved!

Stephen Hawking, as most of you know, is a brilliant man. Through his research in the area of Theoretical Physics, he demonstrated that Einstein's General Theory of Relativity implied that the universe had a beginning in the Big Bang and would end in black holes. In his book, *The Grand Design*, he challenges the belief in a divine creator of the universe. He writes:

"...because there is a law such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself from nothing... It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going."¹

In response to Hawking, John Lennox, a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford (and a devout Christian) writes:

...he blunders into a... series of errors by asking us to choose between God and the laws of physics... They do not conflict but complement each other. That category mistake was not made by a previous holder of Hawking's chair at Cambridge, Sir Isaac Newton. When Newton discovered his law of gravitation he did not say, "Now I have gravity, I don't need God." What he did was to write *Principia Mathematica*, the most famous book in the history of science, expressing the hope that it would "persuade the thinking man" to believe in God.²

In his letter, the apostle Peter now moves from the character and motivations of false teachers to the error of the content of their teaching. And to begin, he emphasizes...

I. The Authority of the Apostles' Teaching

In verses 1 and 2, Peter writes:

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles... (2 Peter 3:1, 2)

I think that most of us recognize the writings of the Old Testament as being the voice of God. Over and over again, we hear God tell His prophets to give a message to the people and the message begins with the words, "*Thus sayeth the LORD...*" So, we don't have much trouble believing that the Old Testament has God as its author. (If you do have trouble believing in the reliability of Scripture, see the resources listed on our webpage.)

But some Christians today openly question parts of the New Testament by saying things like, "Well, the apostle Paul says such and such, but Jesus is silent on that matter, so it must not be that important." Friends, that is a heretical statement and I don't use the term 'heresy' lightly. I define heresy as something which defames or contradicts the person or work of Christ. Do you hear what Peter is saying here? He says we should remember not only the Word of God through the Old Testament prophets but also "...*the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles...*" (v.2) So, all of the teaching of Peter, Paul and John (and I would include the other New Testament writers as well) are actually the teaching of Jesus. So, technically, we shouldn't say, "The apostle Peter said" but we should say, "Jesus said THROUGH the apostle Peter." That's what is technically true.

Do you believe that? If you believe that, then you'll never say, "This teaching is from Paul, but since Jesus never spoke on this topic, then I guess it's optional for me." There is no separation between the teaching of Paul or Peter or John and Jesus. Paul and Peter and John are teaching what Jesus has taught them. End of story! Secondly here, Peter says...

II. God's Actions in the Past Prove That He Will Act in the Present

First of all, Peter says that "*scoffers will come in the last days.*" What's a scoffer? The term is found in both the Old and New Testaments. A simple definition is "someone who treats lightly that which should be taken seriously."³ In Noah's day, they scoffed at Noah's obedience. In Sodom's day they scoffed at the possibility of their city being destroyed because of their sexual behavior. In Peter's day they scoffed at prophecy regarding Jesus' coming again. They said:

... "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:4)

It's actually more than just whether or not Jesus will come again. They're scoffing at the idea of God having any influence in the modern world AT ALL! "...*all things are continuing as they were.*" Really? There was no sign of God's moving among them? None of the prophecies of Scripture were being fulfilled?

I love Peter's first rebuttal to the scoffers. His rebuttal is that the fact that these people are scoffing is itself proof that God is 'moving among them' because God PREDICTED that they would show up!

Then, Peter points to two enormous actions by God in the past, which should assure us that He will take action in our day as well. Those two actions are the creation of the world by the spoken word of God and the judgment through the worldwide flood. Verses 5 and 6:

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

So, miraculous creation (the earth formed... by the word of God) and the reality of a worldwide flood are evidences that Peter cites as facts that scoffers "deliberately overlook." What's your view of how the world began? Do you believe what Genesis 1 says? I think most of you know that I subscribe to a 'young earth' view, but I don't insist that every Christian agree with me. However, if you don't, if you accept that the earth is billions of years old, I have to ask, "Have you really considered the most recent evidence?" I could give you dozens of things to chew on but let me just share two.

Carbon 14 dating is usually cited as proof that the earth is 'billions of years old.' However, with a half-life of 5,700 years, there shouldn't be any Carbon 14 atoms in anything older than 250,000 years. Yet, it's proven impossible to find any natural source of carbon below Pleistocene strata (Ice Age) that DOESN'T contain significant amounts of Carbon 14. These strata are supposed to be millions or billions of years old. What's the Carbon 14 doing there? Scientists of the evolutionary bent have known of this since the 1980's and can't account for it.

Evidence #2: Regarding the worldwide flood, if such a thing like that really happened, then shouldn't there be physical evidence, especially if it happened thousands, not millions, of years ago? Yes, there should be – and there is! For example, sea creature fossils have been found all over the world, even fossilized shellfish in the Himalayas. Or how about the fact that there are sedimentary rock layers that cover whole continents and even cross oceans. For example, the chalk beds of England (the white cliffs of Dover) can be traced across Europe into the Middle East and are also found in the Midwest of the U.S. and Western Australia.⁴

And have you heard of Robert Ballard, the Connecticut-based oceanographer? (I guess this is more than three pieces of evidence...) He studied the depths of the Black Sea and found an ancient shoreline that he said is proof of a catastrophic flood event. He carbon-dated the shells he found there and said he estimates the flood happened around 5,000 BC, which matches what young-earth scientists say would have been the time of Noah's flood. ⁵

Look, am I saying that you're a second-class Christian if you believe in an old earth? No. I'm just trying to do what Peter is doing, which is to remind you of what the Bible says. The Bible says that this world was created miraculously, no matter how old it is, by the "Word of God." And God has continually inserted Himself into the story of this place that He created, the flood being just one such miraculous insertion. If you scoff at that, then you're not testifying to the truth; you're deliberately overlooking the facts. And that isn't building God's kingdom on earth but enabling the Enemy of God to deceive even more people. God's actions in the past actually DO PROVE that He will take action in our day as well. Even in the world of politics.

Lastly, in this section of his letter, Peter now makes a claim that should fill your entire being with hope. He boldly proclaims that...

III. It is NOT God's Desire That Anyone Should Perish.

In verse 7, Peter speaks about a future that is as sure to happen as the events of the past:

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (2 Peter 3:7)

As surely as God created the world, one day, God will judge the world, which will lead to the destruction of it and the ungodly. So, human beings will not destroy this world. We might do great damage to it, we might and we have conducted wars that have killed millions of people, but we will not bring this world to an end. God, who created it, one day will end it.

And in verse 10, he gives us a glimpse of what that end will look like:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10)

There are three "days" mentioned in the Bible; "the day of the Lord," "the day of God," and "the day of Christ." Put simply, "the day of the Lord" is a day of judgment and severe trial. It's not a 24-hour period but an extended period of time including the seven-year Tribulation. While there is tribulation for Christians now, this will be a time of persecution unlike anything the world has ever seen. The "day of the Lord" ends with the whole physical creation being destroyed, as Peter describes it here.

Another 'day' that Scripture speaks of is "the day of God." It's spoken of in 2 Peter 3:12 and I Cor. 15:28. This is the new creation where Christians will live with God in harmony and peace. This is when we enjoy the new heavens and the new earth.

Finally, the Bible speaks of "the day of Christ." This relates to the coming of Jesus for His Bride, the Church, and he takes us out of the world. This is spoken of in I Cor. 1:7-9 and Phil. 1:10 and 2:16 and Matt. 24:36-44.

Now, different commentators and pastors have different views of how these "days" fit together and in what order. Here's what I believe. The "Day of Christ" happens first and I believe it could happen any time. Even before our national elections! If this day comes first, that means, of course, that the Church won't go through the Great Tribulation. Why do I believe that? Jesus said in Matt. 24 that when He comes, no one will know the day or the hour.

...two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. (Matt. 24:40, 41)

But if the Church isn't taken until halfway through the Tribulation or at the end of the Tribulation, we WILL know when He is coming because we know the Tribulation lasts seven years. Also, Jesus says through Peter that the next day, "The day of the Lord" referring to the Tribulation, will also come unannounced. It will come "like a thief." Since I believe that the Tribulation begins immediately after the Church is taken, it would essentially also be unannounced, since it happens almost simultaneously with the "day of Christ."

Finally then, the "Day of God," comes last, which is AFTER the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth and after this world is destroyed by fire and the new heaven and new earth are formed.

But you know what? It's not the order of these days or the timing of these days that really matters. What matters is what Peter says in verse 9: (2 Peter 3:9)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

This, seriously, has to be one of my all-time favorite verses in the Bible. And this isn't the only place that the Bible says this! In I Tim. 2:3, 4, Jesus says through the apostle Paul:

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And God says through the prophet Ezekiel:

"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezek. 18:23)

These verses are why I simply cannot be a five-point Calvinist (John Calvin had five points to his theology). I've learned so much from Calvin about the sovereignty of God, but he's simply wrong about what is called "double predestination" which means that not only are some people predestined for heaven but some are predestined for hell. No, no, no! These verses prove that can't be true. There is great mystery to the ways of God, but this I know: His desire is for all to be saved.

So, with that truth so clearly before us, I must ask, are you? Are you saved? Saved from what? The apostle Paul makes it clear that all people are in grave jeopardy of judgment. Why? Because of justice. So many people cry out for justice today, not knowing that in doing so they're calling for their own demise. Jesus makes it clear through the apostle Paul that...

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Rom. 3:23)

He then goes on to say what this results in or what will happen when justice is applied:

For the wages of sin is death... (Rom. 6:23a)

He's not just talking about physical death but spiritual death, eternal separation from God. Jesus revealed this awful destiny for those who do nothing about their sin before they die. In The Revelation of Jesus Christ, the last book of the Bible, Jesus reveals this to the apostle John:

Then I saw a great white throne and him (Jesus) who was seated on it.... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened...

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11, 12, 15)

This is harsh and troubling stuff. So, how do we avoid this justice? Let's face it: because of our sin, we deserve it. But back in Romans, Jesus tells us how this judgment can be avoided. It comes right after where he tells us that the wages of sin is death. The next words are...

...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23b)

So, it's a gift. You don't earn a gift or even really deserve a gift. You just receive a gift. How do you receive this gift? Rom. 10: 9 tells us:

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

To 'confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord' simply means that you tell Jesus in prayer that you realize that He is the sinless Son of God. To 'believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead,' means that you acknowledge that, while you deserved to die because you broke God's law, you believe that Jesus – who didn't deserve to die – took your place. So, now your debt is paid and you receive it as a gift.

Now, do you see this incredible love that God has for you? Not only does He desire to spend eternity with you, but He made the way to remove your guilt so your name will be written in the Book of Life. Have you secured this transaction? Your name doesn't go in the book because your parents were Christians or because you attend this church. You have to "confess" and "believe." Whatever worship room you're in, we want to walk you through that prayer right now, so each of our site pastors is going to come and lead you through it.

[pause]

If you want to be sure that your name is in the Book of Life that the apostle John wrote about, then just pray this prayer silently as I pray it out loud. Let's pray...

Lord Jesus, I confess that I've sinned as the Bible says. I ask You right now to forgive my sins. And I believe in my heart of hearts that You died on the cross to pay for my sins. I thank You so much for doing that. Now, I commit my life to live for You. I receive Your gift of salvation and I receive You as my Lord, the Leader of my life. Fill me now with Your Holy Spirit so that I can faithfully follow You all my days.

In Your name, Jesus, I pray this... Amen.

Now, we're ready to come to this table of celebration! Did anybody here pray that prayer with me for the first time? Hey, that's awesome! This has a whole new meaning because you're a whole new person. How great is that? Deacons please come...

¹ Excerpt from Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow's *The Grand Design* in the Times Eureka, Issue 12 (sept. 2010), p.25

² Professor John Lennox, "Stephen Hawking and God," rzim.org., Nov. 23, 2010

³ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Alert* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1984), ebook, screen 3, part 14

⁴ Answers in Genesis, "Worldwide Flood, Worldwide Evidence," answersingenesis.org

⁵ "Evidence Noah's Biblical Flood Happened, Says Robert Ballard" Jenna Millman, Bryan Taylor and Lauren Efron, Dec. 10, 2012 abcnews.go.com