

The Dawkind Delusion

by Neale Brinkley

Neale Brinkley's sermon addresses misconceptions about God's character in the Old and New Testaments, emphasizing the consistency of His nature as both merciful and just.

Duration: 37:20

Scripture: Exodus 32:31-33, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 10:30-31, 1 Peter 2:9, 2 Peter 2:4-9

Topics: "Delusion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker contrasts the viewpoint of Dawkins and his group with the message offered by the Bible. The Bible is presented as a source of hope and a solution to the problems of the world. It is described as recording history with a beginning, middle, and end, starting with God's creation of a perfect world. The speaker emphasizes the severity of the problem of sin and the need for a big solution, which only God can provide. The sermon also addresses misconceptions about the Bible, such as the idea that it promotes slavery, and explains how the Old and New Testaments regulate and eventually bring an end to slavery.

Transcript

God bless you. Neil, please come and share. Thank you, George.

As you can imagine, life has been a little different for us over the last week or so. Obviously for Mary, having fractured her left elbow and having it held with a plate and it's bound up and so on, I have to go back to hospital next Monday for a checkup. That will be two weeks.

And as well as that, she has broken a bone in her right hand as well. So that's in a splint. So it means that in practical terms, she's not able to do a great deal.

And I have become, I wouldn't like to call myself a full-time carer, but we sort of work alongside each other in getting along. And it does make a difference because time is one thing that's very, very difficult to estimate. Usually when we schedule to go out, we can work out roughly how long it would take.

I have to say one of us is rather better than the other. I'd keep him to that time. We'll leave that.

But this morning, of course, when all the things that need to be done and so on, so we apologize. We did intend to be here a little bit earlier, but we're glad to be here. We're saying on the way how long it is.

We think it's about six years or something like that, that we're here, which was a retreat the last time we came. And we left the retreat then to drive off to Eastbourne where Mary's aunt was in hospital. So we went there immediately afterwards.

After this, we go back home, which is much easier. Okay, I want to begin this morning with something perhaps a little different, a quotation. I was going to call it the gospel according to Richard Dawkins, except that the word gospel means good news.

And so it ain't appropriate. But here is a quote from Richard Dawkins about the God of the Old Testament. This is what he writes.

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably "the most unpleasant character in all fiction. "Jealous and proud of it, "a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak, "a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser." Now, I hope I can pronounce all this. "A misogynistic, homophobic, racist, "infanticidal, genocidal, philicidal, "pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomachistic, "capriciously malevolent bully." Now, what do you make of that? When I hear something like this, my mind goes back to the early days when I was a Christian at university.

And there was a story circulating then. I don't know whether it's apocryphal or not, but it was of a Welsh preacher who, when he was preaching, as well as having his notes, on the side, he used to put little additional notes to help him in his delivery, you know, when he should speak up and so on. And someone once acquired his notes and was rather astonished to read this little footnote halfway down, and it said, "Shout, point weak." And I rather think that describes Richard Dawkins.

As far as I'm concerned, such language is simply absurd. It's laughable. It actually tells us more about Dawkins than it does about the Old Testament.

And I'm sure we know Richard Dawkins is a declared atheist, a committed atheist, an evangelistic atheist, with a declared hatred of all things Christian. He claims to be a rational thinker, but rationality seems to fly out of the window whenever he turns to the Bible. And in the quote that I just read, he's simply producing a parody of the Old Testament.

It's based on highly selective verses taken out of context, and he completely ignores all the vast amount of other evidence which gives a totally different picture. Now I have to say, you may not agree with this, but intemperate individuals like Hawkins, I have little, they don't really concern me very much. But the fact that he can portray the character of God in a way that is so contrary to all reasonable opinion shouldn't stop us from recognizing that there is in fact a problem here.

And it's a problem that reasonable, ordinary people have. Let me put it this way. When we turn to Scripture, we may well find, we rejoice as we read Psalm 91, Psalm 23, the tenderness of Psalm 23, or the gracious promises, for example, in Jeremiah 31 of the new covenant, we rejoice in that, our hearts are thrilled by that.

But then we read other occasions, Joshua 6, when Joshua is told to totally destroy Jericho. And even more difficult perhaps to understand in 2 Samuel 8, when David made the Moabites lie down on the grounds, and he measured them off. And two thirds, every two thirds are put to death, and one third is allowed to live.

Now that's not easy to handle. And some people have then taken it a stage further and have declared that in fact, the Old Testament and New Testament depictions of God are altogether different, strikingly so. The Old Testament, they argue, speaks of a God of wrath and vengeance.

By contrast, in the New Testament, we have a God of love and forgiveness, seen supremely, of course, in the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus. In the Old Testament, they say, we constantly find God commanding his people to overcome and even annihilate all their enemies. In the New Testament, here is the teaching of Jesus, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your father in heaven.

So it's a genuine argument that we need to address. And I want to do a little of that this morning. The first question I would simply ask is this, is what these people say a true summary of biblical teaching, of what the Bible actually says? And I would insist very strongly that only a minimal amount of reading or study would show, beyond question, that this picture they present is simply not the case.

And what I want to do is just to look at a couple of aspects of this. First of all, the Old Testament and forgiveness, and then the New Testament and judgment. And we'll see a few verses.

So the Old Testament and forgiveness, is there much in the Old Testament on forgiveness? In fact, it's easy to find countless verses that have this aspect of the character of God. Take, for example, one of the most outstanding examples of all, Moses at the time of the making of the golden calf. And he goes and he prays.

So Moses went back to the Lord and said, oh, what a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves gods of gold. And now listen to this, but now please forgive their sin, but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.

Now I find that staggering. Here is Moses so concerned that the people of God, the Israelites should be forgiven. And he actually says to God, but shut me out of your presence for all eternity, if that's what it takes.

Now, I would say that apart from the Lord Jesus himself, we struggle to find, even in the New Testament, a more striking example than that. Again, here's Moses after the failure to enter the promised land. In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.

Another example, Moses praying for the peoples that God would forgive them. Leave Moses, move on to King David. And the occasion, I'm skimming through this fairly quickly, of course.

2 Samuel chapter nine, and his dealings with the grandson of Saul, Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, when he displayed an attitude totally unlike that of all the rulers in the surrounding nations. 2 Samuel nine. David asked, is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake? And then verse three, is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness? Now, the normal thing you would expect in Old Testament times in the nations is if there is someone who might be a potential ruler or threaten your position on the throne, it's to get rid of them.

And for even David to go not to take that route is one thing, but that word kindness is a very interesting word, because it's not the word that you use for ordinary human kindness. In fact, it's the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is the word used time after time after time for God's special covenant love. And that's what

David wants to extend to Mephibosheth.

He wants him to know precisely that same love and forgiveness and kindness that God has extended to him. That's David. Solomon, another example.

This is his prayer at the dedication of the temple. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place. Hear from heaven your dwelling place.

And when you hear, forgive. Countless, countless, countless examples. Just one more.

In fact, it's almost a whole book, the book of Hosea. For Hosea is a living demonstration of the enduring love and mercy of God. The extent to which God is willing to forgive those who have turned against him, have rebelled against him, have sinned against him.

This is just one verse. This is God's promise coming through Hosea. I will heal their waywardness and love them freely.

For my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like a lily.

So that's just a few out of many, many, many. I actually, this morning, I don't know whether those who preach find that you do this when you preach. There's other thoughts keep coming into your mind, you see.

And I was going to check up this morning. I have a feeling that there are maybe even more verses on forgiveness in the Old Testament than in the New. I don't know that.

I'm going to check that up when I go back. But there are countless verses along those lines. And the only explanation that can be given is that these Old Testament characters acted in such a way because they were convinced that that was the nature of the God in whom they believed, and that God was pleased with that, and they wanted to do that which pleased God.

So without any question at all, despite Dawkins and all the rest of them, the Old Testament abounds with teaching and practicing of forgiveness and love and mercy. That's the Old Testament. Now in the light of that, it shouldn't surprise us, considering it is the same God, that we will find New Testament teaching on the wrath and judgment of God.

And again, just a few quotations. This, in fact, is how Paul begins his letter to the Romans. Romans 1.18. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven "against all the godliness and wickedness of men "who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Very, very clear teaching.

And the Apostle Peter even uses Old Testament examples to make the same point in 2 Peter 2. This is rather longer, but it's worth reading. "For if God did not spare angels who sinned, "but sent them to hell, "putting them in gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment, "if he did not spare the ancient world "when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, "but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, "and seven others, "if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah "by burning them to ashes, "and made them an example "of what is going to happen to the ungodly, "and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, "who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men, "for that righteous man living among them day after day "was tormented in his righteous soul "by the lawless deeds he saw and heard, "if this is so, "then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials, "and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment

"while continuing their punishment." And one other quotation from the writer to the Hebrews. "For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge, I will repay, "and again, the Lord will judge his people.

"It is a fearful thing "to fall into the hands of the living God." Now there are those in the light of verses like this, you notice I've quoted from Paul and from Peter, and from the writer to in the Hebrews, whoever that may be, it's unknown. There are those who said, well, what has happened is this, they said, Jesus taught one thing, and Paul and others later corrupted his teaching, and that's why we get this kind of different emphasis. Unfortunately, once again, the facts simply don't bear that out.

A couple of verses from the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. "If your right eye causes you to sin, "gouge it out and throw it away, "it is better for you to lose one part of your body "than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." And then Matthew 10, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, "but cannot kill the soul. "Rather, be afraid of the one "who can destroy both soul and body in hell." So summarizing where we've reached so far, just as in the Old Testament, there is clear teaching, many examples of mercy and forgiveness, so in the New Testament, there's clear teaching and examples of God's wrath and judgment.

Both David in the Old Testament and Paul in the New, both murderers were recipients of God's mercy. Equally, both Achan in the Old Testament and Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament experienced God's judgment. So we can say this, unless we have already made up our minds in advance and refuse to consider the evidence, it is remarkably true that there is a consistency between the Old and the New Testament.

Justice, holiness, righteousness, forgiveness, mercy, and love, they're all biblical words. They are not restricted to either the Old or the New. And it's therefore totally false, as some do, to suggest that the Old Testament is outdated, it's redundant, and that we now live in a more enlightened age.

Rather, the truth is this. The Old, the New Testament supplements, amplifies, explains the New Testament, but it never, ever attempts to correct it. In fact, there's never the slightest suggestion in the New Testament that the Old Testament is mistaken, only that it's incomplete.

It needs adding to, but it is not wrong in itself. So it follows on from that, then this goes back to our quotation from Dawkins, that those who have a problem, a supposed problem with God and his supposed character, have, in fact, a problem with scripture as a whole, not simply the Old Testament. So how do we answer these people who bring these charges? Well, we could try and answer some of them in detail, tackle some.

I don't want to do that. What I want to do in the time left to me is to make two points that I believe are central to a correct understanding, not only of the God of the Old Testament, but the God of the New Testament, the God of eternity. And these are the two points.

Simply, only scripture presents the bigger picture, and we'll look at that in a moment. And then secondly, only scripture reveals the greater plan. So only scripture presents the bigger picture.

All of us in this room and elsewhere, all of us view the world in which we live, our surroundings, our environment, and so on, we view it from our own personal perspective. And the majority, the overwhelming majority, would be prepared to concede that inevitably, our perspective is limited and therefore restricted. But there are a great many people, probably the majority, who say, they take it in fact

as beyond dispute, that our viewpoint today, the viewpoint of our modern world, is altogether more valid than that of our forefathers who lived in times past.

They say that because there are massive gains in science and technology, we've progressed so far beyond them that our understanding of the world is so much greater also. Now I think most of us would be prepared to concede that. You know, we do know much more today in so many areas.

That is as far as the material world is concerned. But it is highly debatable, highly, highly debatable, to say that in the realm of morals and ethics, we have vastly improved and that the world of today, the living, the standard of caring for others and so on, is much greater than it used to be in times past. You can't possibly pretend that the world of today does not abound in evil and wickedness, just as it has always done.

Indeed, if you go, you don't have to go back too far in history to consider monsters like Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Pol Pot, who probably, well almost certainly in that question, were responsible for the death of more people, slaughtering more people indiscriminately with Stalin, even planning a famine to destroy many millions Ukrainians, even going to that extent. And to say that we have improved. And consider today, George mentioned in his prayer, Syria, Libya, other parts of our world, there's so many, many examples.

This world morally is not a better place. And what is interesting is that Dawkins, who would say that it is, in fact, they really, in reality, have nothing to offer that is helpful to people. Here's a quotation, again, I took it from John Blanchard's book, *Does God Believe in Atheists?* And a very interesting book, I commend it, if you've never read it.

Interesting title, of course. And in that book, he quotes from a Daily Telegraph interview with Richard Dawkins. And this is Dawkins speaking.

Suppose that some child is dying of cancer, we say. Why is this child dying? What has he done to deserve it? The answer is, there's no reason why. There's no reason other than a series of historical accidents which had led to this child dying of cancer.

No reason to ask why. When reminded that this is precisely the question people do ask, Dawkins' only response was, that's their problem. So callous, so indifferent.

Here is a man who's putting the world right, so it says. And when there's all this suffering and so on, people, this one example, he just says, well, tough. Tough, nothing you can do about it, it's their problem.

Well, if that is the kind of gospel according to Dawkins, well, I'm sure we don't want it. And we can strongly say to others, forget it. Whatever his scientific claims, and I'm no scientist, there are others like Howard who are far, far better than me but that's Dawkins.

But having said that, it seems to me that what we clearly need is a view of the world that makes the greatest sense of the world as it is, or at least as we see it. Now, we wouldn't expect such a viewpoint necessarily to answer all our questions, it wouldn't happen. But I think we would expect several things.

We'd expect it to be consistent, coherent, and both intellectually and morally satisfying. It should provide an explanation, some explanation and interpretation of the past. It should provide a strength and support for the present.

And it should provide a hope and goal for the future. And having said that, you can see how Dawkins and his group, they fall short. They may put forward some explanation from the past.

They have nothing whatsoever to offer in the present and even less for the future. No hope, there's nothing there, they said. You've got nothing at all to look forward to.

So what message is that to offer to a sad and sick and dying world? We're looking for such a viewpoint and I am convinced that the Bible offers that very thing. The Bible, this is just a brief summary. It records history with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

It begins with God's creative act bringing into existence a world which was altogether good, with men and women living in harmony. In that world, no hint of murder or slavery or any of the other things which have marred and blighted our world since. Such things only followed human rebellion against God.

Sin, it was sin that disrupted creation and consequently, we now live in a world of evil and suffering. And we should remember that most of the Old Testament, indeed part of the New, is concerned with the middle of the story as the world just has been and still is. And it only makes sense when you bear that in mind.

It is not, the Old Testament does not wrap up everything and tell you how things are going to finish. Neither was much of the New Testament for that matter. And it's altogether wrong to take the moral teaching of the Bible, you can't take it and attempt to summarize it as Dawkins does with a sort of brief quotation taken out of context, from the Old Testament taken out of context.

One of the things, for example, I'll just take one instance. It said that the Bible teaches slavery. Now in fact, the Old Testament was a world in which slavery was practiced and accepted.

But if you look closely at the Old Testament, you'll find that it is regulated, that there are restrictions put upon what can be done with slaves. And as you read on into the New Testament in particular, there are precepts and practices introduced which inevitably brought slavery to an end. That's why it was evangelicals like Wilberforce, Bible-believing people who brought slavery and fought against it for so long.

And then in the Bible, the viewpoint, it is only at the end that God will make all things new. And then a new heaven and a new earth, tears, death, mourning, crying, pain, every other part upon human existence, banished, gone forever. Righteousness and joy will triumph, not suffering and evil.

That's the bigger picture that the Bible presents. And many of these problems which we have and struggle with should be considered in that context. So that's the bigger picture, but also Scripture, only Scripture reveals the greater plan.

I love to hear Mike, when he started praying and talked about God's plan, and it is a tremendous plan. The problem is, because many people do not acknowledge or accept either the essence or the enormity of the dilemma facing mankind, they don't see or remain ignorant of the substance, the severity of the solution that is needed. It's such a big problem that the essence the solution must be equally big.

What people say is that sin is human frailty, human weakness, no more, or result of environmental factors or things outside a person's control. They don't acknowledge that sin has lasting consequences and can affect their eternal destiny. And according to the Bible, the problem of sin and its ramification is so far, so far reaching, that only God is able to provide a solution for it.

So here we go, as we come into water close. I want to just say of this plan, I want to emphasize two aspects because I believe they're central. In the Old Testament, in the Old Testament story, at the heart of the Old Testament story, and our understanding of the Old Testament, is God's choosing and calling out a people for himself.

This is the book of Exodus, just before the giving of the Ten Commandments. You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations, you'll be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine, you'll be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Why did God act in certain ways for Israel and against the nations? It's because he's calling out and preparing his people. And in the book of Deuteronomy, there's a lovely passage in chapter four, which looks back and says how absolutely astonishing this act of God is.

Ask now about the former days long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth, ask from one end of the heaven to the other, has anything so great as this ever happened? Or has anyone like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire as you haven't lived? Has any God tried to make for himself one nation out of another nation? By testings, by miraculous signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes, you were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God. Besides him, there is no other. Well, I could bring many other quotations to substantiate this point, but the point is quite clear, isn't it? So much of the Old Testament can only make sense for us, for anyone, when viewed in the light of God's purposes for the people of Israel.

And obviously, there is the New Testament parallel. Not a nation this time, but the church. Interesting to see the Apostle Peter takes the very words of Moses, applies them to the church.

1 Peter 2, but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

And then Paul, right into the Ephesians. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone. In the whole building, in him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirits. Now, I realize that my look at this big, big question, it's only been very, very, very sketchy, but I trust we've seen, been reminded of the greatness of God's purposes. They will not be thwarted by any opposition and he will complete all things to his glory and for our blessing.

Want to do two things as I conclude. The first of those is another quotation taken from John Blanchard's book, *Does God Believe in Atheists?* This time, the reference is to someone quite different. You may know him, the Christian preacher and writer, Brian Edwards.

Brian Edwards made a routine visit to his doctor's surgery. And this is it. As he was turning to leave, the doctor suddenly asked him, how can you believe in a God who allows all the suffering in the world today? He had apparently been asking the question for years, but had never been given a satisfactory answer.

Edwards responded the best he could in the few minutes available to him, then ended with a perfectly reasonable challenge. You may find my explanation unsatisfactory, but at least with a belief in God, I have an answer. Without a belief in God, you face the same problems without an answer.

That's Brian Edwards. So how do we conclude? In summary, three things. First, we have and should have and do have absolute confidence in the Bible.

Secondly, we have absolute and utter confidence in the God of the Bible. And thirdly, we have absolute and total confidence in the purposes of the God of the Bible. Thank you, praise the Lord.

Thank you, Neil.

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