

GOD IS LIGHT

Many will know of Stephen Hawking. He was a celebrated theoretical physicist and cosmologist, and director of research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at the University of Cambridge. More importantly, Stephen Hawking was a celebrated atheist. When he was a young man, he was diagnosed with a form of motor neurone disease which paralyzed him, and, finally, killed him. He died three years ago. Seven years before he died, he gave an interview to theGuardian.com, a news and media website. In the interview, the correspondent asked Hawking, “You had a health scare and spent time in hospital in 2009. What, if anything, do you fear about death?” Hawking replied:

I have lived with the prospect of an early death for the last 49 years. I'm not afraid of death, but I'm in no hurry to die. I have so much I want to do first. I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark. (theGuardian.com, 15 May 2011)

John Lennox is a mathematician and bioethicist, and Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at Oxford University. More importantly, John Lennox is a Christian. To Hawking's statement about life after death, Lennox replied, “Atheism is a fairy story for people afraid of the light.” His reply, though brief, is profound. Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)

The history of the world is one of the conflict between light and darkness, good and evil, God and His rebellious creatures. The Scriptures open with these words:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

God created the heavens and the earth, and there was no light; only darkness. God did not create darkness. darkness is not a thing in itself; it is but the absence of light. God created light, and he separated the light from the darkness and there was the first day. This distinction of physical light and darkness is symbolic of the distinction between moral light and darkness, and the distinction of light and darkness is a theme that runs throughout Scripture.

God is the creator of the world. This is a truth that God reveals to men, and that men apprehend by faith. God has revealed this truth, and a righteous man takes God at His word. Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:1-3)

The God of the Bible exists, and men know that He exists because God has made Himself known to them. He has made Himself known to them through His creation. David wrote in the Psalms, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1, 2) Saint Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, enlarged upon the point. He wrote:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” (Romans 1:18-23, 28)

God through His creation has revealed Himself to all mankind. The problem is not that men do not know God; it is rather that, although they do know Him, they will not acknowledge Him. Because they refuse to acknowledge Him, they are left vainly to speculate about the world; and so their hearts are darkened, and they become reprobate fools. Because they abandon God, God abandons them to their sinful natures. If they would seek God, then they would do so like blind men groping in their blindness. Saint Paul told the philosophers of Athens:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. (Acts 17:24-27)

There is only one true God, but that God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are not different modes of existence of one Person, but one God existing in three Persons. The Persons are all one, “the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.” (The Athanasian Creed) To King David God revealed that He has a Son. God made a covenant with David in which He said:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men. (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

In the Second Psalm, David recorded the words that God spoke to His Son concerning His kingdom: “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Psalm 2:7, 8) In the Eighty-ninth Psalm, Ethan the Ezrahite recorded the words of God to His Son concerning the covenant of David:

He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. (Psalm 89:26-29)

When God created the world, He did so through His Wisdom. In the eighth chapter of the Book of Proverbs, King Solomon personified the Wisdom of God, and the Wisdom of God said that He was with God in eternity, before creation, and that He was present when God created. He said:

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. (Proverbs 8:22-30)

This Wisdom of God was with God in eternity, and He was with God when He created the world. Wisdom was not only with God at the Creation, He was God’s instrument of creation. So it says in the Book of Psalms, “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.” (Psalm 104:24; compare Psalm 136:5) In the Proverbs, Agur, son of Jakeh, alluded to Solomon’s personification of Wisdom. He wrote of God the Father and God the Son, and their creating the world: “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?” (Proverbs 30:4) So Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews of the Son of God, “by whom also he made the worlds,” and to the Colossians he wrote, “For by him were all things created.” (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16)

The Isrealites knew of God’s covenant with David, and they expected one of his descendents to inherit his throne. They also knew that this heir, this Christ, would be the Son of God, although they did not at first fully understand what meant. Jesus of Nazareth is the very Son of God whom God promised to send, and whom the people expected. When the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, he told her, “Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” (Luke 1:31-33) When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, God spoke from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) When Jesus first met Nathaniel, Jesus told him that He, without seeing with His eyes, had perceived Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree. Jesus’s supernatural knowledge caused Nathaniel to confess,

“Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” (John 1:49) In the earlier part of Jesus’s earthly ministry, many of His disciples abandoned Him, but the twelve remained. When He asked them if they would also abandon Him, Saint Peter said to Him, “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:69) After the death of Lazarus, his sister Martha was stricken with grief. Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” She answered Him, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11:25-27) People held different opinions of Jesus, and when He asked His disciples who they believed Him to be, Saint Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) At the end of Jesus’s earthly ministry, the religious leaders of Israel arrested Him and interrogated Him. He refused to answer them. Finally, the high priest put Him under oath, and said to Him, “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” Then Jesus spoke, and, appealing to the prophecy of Daniel, said, “Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:57-64) Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Son of God, heir to the throne of David, heir of the world.

Although God has revealed Himself through the creation, and in the Scriptures, His greatest revelation of Himself is in His incarnate Son. Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” (Hebrews 1:1, 2) Saint John explained, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 3:18)

The apostles did not follow “cunningly devised fables,” as Saint Peter put it, but were “eyewitnesses of His majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16) Saint John wrote of his being witness to the life of the incarnate Son of God. He opened one of his letters this way:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.” (1 John 1:1-3)

Jesus was no figment of the apostles’ imaginations, nor was He phantom. He was the incarnate Son of God, a man of flesh and blood, whom the apostles observed with their senses. They heard him, they saw Him, they touched Him. They experienced the life of the Author of life. This is what they witnessed. The apostles had fellowship with God the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and in this fellowship they have eternal life. So, they bore witness to the Son of God, and they did so that others might join them in their fellowship and have eternal life with them, so that they might have great joy. Saint John wrote, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” (1 John 1:3, 4) Saint John proclaimed the message that Jesus gave to them:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:5-10)

God is perfectly good, and there is no evil in Him. If anyone lives in rebellion against God, then cannot be in fellowship with God, and he is a liar if he says otherwise. If he lives in submission to God, however, then He does have fellowship with God, and with His Son, and his sins are forgiven. This forgiveness is not without condition, however. If a man says he does not sin, then he is a liar, and He would make God a liar. If he confesses his sin, however, then God will forgive him. There is no forgiveness without repentance.

Saint John wrote, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1, 2) He wrote His letter to exhort Christians never to sin. Knowing, however, that Christians will sometimes sin, he wrote to exhort them to know that Jesus Christ, the one sinless man, is their advocate before the Father, and the propitiation of their sins, and not for theirs only, but for believers across space and time.

Saint John began His Gospel by alluding to the Scriptures which tell of God's work of creation through His Son. He wrote:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1-5)

The Son of God created the material world, and He created the light that dispelled the darkness of the world. He is the One who is creating a new spiritual world, and He is the Light that is dispelling the darkness of that world. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12; compare John 9:5)

Let us understand that life is a conflict between light and darkness. Let us be grateful that God sent His Son into the world to shine His light on the darkness. Let us repent of our sins, that we might continue to walk in the light.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.