

Kington Baptist Church

MESSAGE BOARD – 95

A fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' (Psalm 53.1)

A little story. There were two scientists; we'll call one Dar and the other Win. They differed over a theory involving the reaction of a rare metal to an electrical current. An experiment would produce a result, and the result would fall into one of two categories: true or false. The theory to be tested by experiment was that a current of a given voltage would cause the metal to glow with radiant heat. Win's position was that the theory was true. Daw took the opposite view; his position was that the theory was false. The laboratory technician pulled a lever. Soon the object glowed with radiant heat. Win gleamed with self-satisfaction. Daw looked dark, angry and demoralised. 'No!' he exclaimed. 'I can hardly see how anyone ought to wish that to be true. This is a damnable result!'

As memorials and statues of people with questionable histories are reassessed and repositioned, Shrewsbury, my home town, is making a great effort to heap more honour and greater dignity on the memory of its most famous son: Charles Darwin.

I've no intention of saying anything on the subject of 'Darwinianism'. I lack the competence to do so. But I wish to remark on some words Charles Darwin included in his autobiography. They are remarkable and striking words and illustrate that none of us are quite what we seem to be. It appears that Darwin was not only a scientist. Indeed, on the most vital question of his life, the subject of most concern, he showed a marvellous contempt for the scientific method, indeed for any intelligent or reasonable method. His response to this greatest of all questions was purely emotional, an emotional reaction to something he feared. And, solely on the grounds of this emotional reaction of fear, he denied the truth and reality of the thing he feared. His abandonment of the 'scientific method' resulted in Charles Darwin 'damning' (his word) the teaching of Jesus about the eternal future, the most serious subject our Lord ever taught. I'll quote Darwin's words:

I can hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, this would include all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.

These words must rate among the most foolish words a wise person could ever utter. They are perfect proof of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians:

Christ sent me to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will

destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the clever.' Where is wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, not many wise in the world's opinion, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, things which are despised, has God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that none should glory in his presence.

Darwin's response to the teaching of Jesus perfectly sums up the typical response of the 'natural man' to the Word of God, the Christian gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ – and that's my reason for talking about Darwin.

I'm not concerned here with 'Darwinianism' but with this man's response to the Word of God on a subject that Jesus so clearly taught but which Darwin rejected, merely because he found it distasteful and abhorrent to own his way of thinking – a truth that filled him with fear. That is significant, and it's significant that it was this man, Charles Darwin, who reacted in this way. Darwin is held up as the epitome of the scientific method, of pure objectivity. It is also of course significant that it is Jesus Christ, whose words and teaching Darwin dismissed as cruel and 'damnable'.

Darwin's words are extraordinary for these reasons:

Firstly, they are unscientific

That Darwin's response to the teaching of Jesus is unscientific wouldn't be of interest in most cases. After all we don't usually think of the great truths of the faith in terms of the 'scientific method'. But in reality this is exactly the 'method' we use in responding to the words of Jesus, though we may not realise this. I'm presented with certain truths about God. They come to me through reading or hearing. After being convinced of their truth, and that they apply to me, I believe them. But what convinces me of their truth? Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit. But in responding to the Holy Spirit I ask certain questions and use certain ways of thinking. That is the way I become convinced. In essence it is the 'scientific method'. Darwin explicitly denied that 'science has anything to do with Christ'. He rejected the historical fact that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Darwin called himself an 'agnostic'. But 'in his heart' he said 'there is no God'. In truth Darwin was an atheist. Faced with Jesus Christ and the claims of Christ 'agnosticism' is an impossible position: *'he that is not with me is against me'*. (Matthew 12.30)

Nonetheless, Darwin thought that 'the habit of scientific research makes a man cautious in admitting evidence'. But there's no indication he considered the 'evidence' or used any 'scientific research' in determining the truth of this most monumental question. Here is a man, Charles Darwin, who applied the scientific method with extreme care and meticulous investigation; who devoted enormous lengths of time and effort so as to

arrive at a certain finding, a certain conclusion. He observed and made use of the fact that certain ways of behaving will lead to certain results in certain circumstances. This was central to his theories. He recognised and accepted such outcomes. He didn't reject them because he'd prefer that things turned out differently! He was a scientist. But here, with this most vital enquiry, and with an outcome that could not be more momentous, he decides, for no good reason, to abandon his usual method of examination, investigation and enquiry. In this *one* case – the case of Jesus Christ and his teaching and claims – he ignores the 'scientific method', the method he relied on, to leave him free to deny and deride a truth that clashed with his own ideas, his emotions, his prejudice, preconceptions, expectations and preferences. There's no proof Albert Einstein acutely said, 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results'. But it would be no less true had he said it. How foolish to live in denial of God, his ways and his truth and expect a result different from that which Jesus forewarns!

They are myopic

Darwin's words reveal that he was unable to see any glimpse of the love, mercy, grace and patience of God. The loving provision God has made to meet our need and save us from the terror of sin and the despair of Hell. Darwin merely caught a glimpse of something he feared, something that terrified him and decided he didn't want it to be true – he never looked up from the eye-piece of his myopic microscope to see the wider picture.

They are profoundly ungrateful

Darwin's words are those of a man who wilfully rejected the remedy freely offered for the state in which he found himself. He chose, for no other reason than a personal disposition, an emotional reaction, to ignore the problem and the impending catastrophe. With the ingratitude and arrogance of a person who thinks too well of himself and too little of God, he turned his back on the Son of God. He overlooked the truth of Jesus, who is truth. He had no interest in the gift of God; he thought he did not need the gift of God and chose to disbelieve the warnings of God. He turned his back on the Saviour of the world. The One who suffered all Darwin feared and dreaded, and infinitely more, to free us from the appalling plight in which we find ourselves. Darwin's words are an expression of profound ingratitude. He foolishly assumed that all Jesus had suffered for us was unnecessary.

Lastly, they are simply ignorant

Darwin's rejection of this truth was motivated by his sense of outrage at what he thought he knew, what he thought, as he said, to be the 'plain language of the text'. But he made no attempt, made no effort, went to no lengths to investigate the true state of the question. He gave no time to interrogate the Word of God. He attempted no personal confrontation with Jesus Christ, whose teaching this is. He abandoned the meticulous, careful investigation of his approach to every other subject, from rocks and finches to snails and doves. He abandoned himself to a whim – and risked the very thing he most feared and dreaded – sadly many follow him.