

HUXLEY, GOD, AND LITTLE NOEL

Presented by

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Through the ages, there have been many people who have abandoned their belief in God because of the presence of evil, pain, and suffering in their lives or in the lives of those close to them. In Blake's lesson, "Darwin, God, and Little Annie," he explained how, in 1851, Charles Darwin abandoned once and for all his belief in God after the death of his ten-year-old daughter, Annie. Darwin blamed God for Annie's untimely death, and refused to ever again acknowledge God's existence.

But Charles Darwin was not the only person among his group of friends to have such an experience. One of Darwin's closest friends was a scientist by the name of Thomas Henry Huxley, who was a medical doctor. Because of Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species*, which had made evolution so popular, Dr. Huxley had given up his belief in God and had replaced it with belief in evolution.

Dr. Huxley had a 4-year-old son by the name of Noel whom he loved very much. In 1860—nine years after Darwin's daughter Annie died—little Noel contracted a disease known as scarlet fever and became very sick. On September 15, 1860, Noel died in his father's arms. One biography about the lives of Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley stated that Noel's death brought Huxley "...to the edge of a breakdown. Huxley tried to rationalize the 'holy leave-taking' as he stood over the body, with its staring blue eyes and tangled golden hair, but the tragedy left a deep scar." Dr. Huxley became very angry over Noel's death.

Then, to make matters worse, at Noel's funeral the minister who preached the service referred to 1 Corinthians 15:14-19 in his remarks about Noel. Part of that passage by the apostle Paul says, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen." When the preacher quoted the section of Scripture that said, "if the dead be not raised," Huxley was furious because he did not believe in God, Jesus, or the existence of life after death in heaven.

Eight days after Noel's death, on September 23, 1860, Dr. Huxley wrote a letter to one of his closest friends, in which he made the following comment about the minister's words: "I cannot tell you how much they shocked me. The preacher had neither a wife nor a child, or he would have known that his idea of being raised from the dead involved a blasphemy against all that is the best and noblest in human nature. I could have laughed with scorn." In one book that was written later about the life of Thomas Henry Huxley, the author said this about Dr. Huxley on the day of his son's death:

"Huxley sat in the study facing the tiny body. His emotions were unleashed as he looked back to that New Year's Eve 1856, when he had sat at the same desk and pledged on his son's birth to give 'a new and healthier direction to all biological science.' He had found redemption on his son's death. There was no blame, **only submission to nature**, and that brought its own comfort."

“Submission to nature” became Huxley’s goal in life from that point forward. His belief in God had evaporated completely. All that remained was to give “a new and healthier direction to biological science.” And so it was to “nature” that Huxley devoted the remainder of his life. Because he was willing to defend so strongly Charles Darwin’s ideas about evolution, Dr. Huxley became known in the scientific community as “Darwin’s bulldog”—a name that he invented for himself and always enjoyed using. On March 22, 1861, Huxley wrote to his wife about some people to whom he had been lecturing on evolution. He said, “By next Friday evening they will all be convinced that they are monkeys.”

On June 29, 1895, at the age of 70 years old, Thomas Henry Huxley died. He never referred to himself as an **atheist**—a person who states positively that there is no God. Rather, he always called himself an **agnostic**—a word that he invented to describe a person who felt that it was impossible to know whether or not God actually existed.

Now, of course, Huxley **knows** that God exists. But it is too late for him. In John 3:36, Jesus said, “He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Huxley’s little son Noel will one day be in heaven with God. But Huxley will not—because he blamed God for Noel’s death, and gave up his faith in God as a result.

The psalmist once wrote that “many sorrows shall be to the wicked” (Psalm 32:10). The apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap.” Yes, God does allow people to reject Him and rebel against His revealed will for their lives. But if they do, they will suffer what Jesus Himself called “the judgment of Hell” (Matthew 23:33). Huxley lived a sad life here on Earth because he gave up his belief in God. But the sadness he experienced here cannot compare to the sadness he will have to endure for eternity. That’s something to think about, isn’t it?