

Whenever I tell people that I studied science and theology they do a double take. How can you study the two together? Surely they are at opposite ends of the spectrum? How can you believe in the Bible *and* in Evolution? The fact is, they are quite easy to study together because they are both seeking the same thing – the truth. They are simply looking at it from different perspectives.

Part of the apparent conflict arises because when interviewed on the television, we are often faced with polarising views from people who are fixed on their own interpretation of the world. So you might be faced with a radical Christian fundamentalist versus Richard Dawkins, whose atheistic views are well known.

That aside though, it's interesting to note that a prominent science atheist, Lord May, who was president of the British Association of Science, has recently stated that it may be essential for the survival of the human race to actually *have* a religion. He's noticed that cultures that believe in God outlive those that don't. No-one knows why. It's speculated that it's because belief gives some sort of evolutionary benefit – the survival of the fittest. If you have no moral guidance other than yourself and your own conscience, then you can effectively do whatever you like, whereas those who have a belief system are more aware of society's rules and ways of working in harmony.

What we need is a judge – something or someone independent who can tell us what to do and who can punish when we don't. Such a common standard helps us to work together as a team. If you have God as your judge, you can choose to ignore him but you make such a choice at your own peril. Lord May argues that belief in God is a way of survival in a dog-eat-dog world as it places emphasis on working together. It's better to believe in an all-powerful God, he argues, than to expend that energy in thinking up ways to make another person who you don't like's life awful.

And yet, the idea of God as a judge sits uncomfortably for many of us – indeed, many are put off religion altogether by the notion. When you look at some judges around the world; at the power and corruption that seems to be linked to the role, it's difficult to think of God in anything like the same way. If God were a terrifying judge, who would want to believe in him?

In this country, most judges thankfully are idealists who apply the laws that the government passes. In doing so they often create that elusive thing, justice. In the context of the Father, it is God's justice that lets the oppressed go free.

God started this justice with the Jews, freeing them from the yoke of the Egyptians and giving them the ten commandments to direct them to behave compassionately towards others and warning them what would happen if they disobeyed. The intention was that these laws would be passed on to the rest of the world but instead they became a barrier to those who were not born Jews as they were augmented by many harsh local traditions that sought to exclude rather than include. We heard St Paul's words this morning in the letter he wrote to the church in Rome to seek to address this very problem.

The Christian Church had, in AD 48, already decided that the only Old Testament laws which could apply to non-Jews are those against idols, murder, cruelty and sexual immorality. Paul himself had found, whilst still a Pharisee, that he couldn't keep all the Jewish law; no-one could! But how would this square with a God who is judge? God would have to punish selfish behaviour of which we are all guilty.

It is only by faith in God's forgiveness and mercy, argues Paul, and through the grace of the

Holy Spirit that we have power to change and be justified.

The eighth chapter of Romans (called the Gospel according to St. Paul by many) is the climax of this teaching. It's not an easy read as it uses legal language a lot: for example, we need to remember that "righteous" means "not guilty", and "justification" means God treating the guilty as though they were not. Then it's true, Paul claims, that what the Law couldn't do because human nature is weak, God did. He condemned the sin in human nature by sending his Son who came with a nature like man's sinful nature to do away with sin.

God did this so that the demands of the law might be fully satisfied by us who live according to the Spirit and not according to human nature. God, in the form of Jesus Christ, was the only human being capable of taking human nature and making it perfect. And in doing so, broke the hold sin has on us. He justified man as a species, and paved the way for all of us to enter God's kingdom.

And that, is something that is worth believing in.