

A Reasonable Faith

2

Does God Exist?

The Bible never defends the existence of God. It just states it as a matter of fact. The very first words of the Bible are:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

There is no metaphysics here. There is no philosophical pondering on where God himself came from or how God could have no beginning. God just is. He always was and he always will be.

The infinite qualities of God undergird the whole of Scripture. When asked for his name, God replied in **Exodus 3:14**:

“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This “I am” quality of God – his eternally self-existent nature – echoes through the chapters of the Bible. He is called the Eternal God (**Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; Romans 16:26**) the One who has existed “from everlasting to everlasting” (**1 Chronicles 16:36**) and “from all eternity” (**Psalms 93:2**), “who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see” (**1 Timothy 6:16**). He is called the Ancient of Days (**Daniel 7:9**), the Alpha and Omega (**Revelation 1:8**), the first and the last (**Isaiah 44:6; 48:12**), the beginning and the end (**Revelation 22:13**), “who was, and is, and is to come” (**Revelation 4:8**). In fact, so great is God that he is declared “beyond our understanding” (**Job 36:26**).

In **Isaiah 40:28**, the prophet asks:

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.”

Is the Christian Faith Rational?

▶ **Does God Exist?** ◀

Is the Bible God’s Word?

Do Science and Scripture Agree?

Why is There Evil in the World?

Do Miracles Really Happen?

What Should We Think of Jesus?

Did Jesus Die and Rise Again?

Is There a Heaven and Hell?

Is There No Other Way of Salvation?

Can We Really Know the Truth?

How Do I Share My Faith?

While the Bible doesn't seek to explain the existence of God, it does clearly state God's view of those who would deny his existence. **Psalm 14:1** tells us:

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

The Hebrew word here translated “fool” also denotes “one who is morally deficient.”¹ In other words, it is out of a desire to be relieved of moral accountability to God that a person says, “There is no God.” If you read what follows this verse, you see the consequences of that foolish denial of God's existence:

“The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

The issue of God's existence has profound consequences for the moral foundations of society. According to Mortimer Adler:

“More consequences for thought and action follow the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other basic question.”²

For this reason, the question “Does God exist?” could be called the Big Question. It is extremely important to discover the answer to this question, for it has implications not only for moral accountability, but also for eternal destiny. This question should never be taken lightly. For if God does not exist, then the only perspective for life is to be found within the small confines of human society. But if God does exist, then everything changes. We are suddenly accountable to One higher than ourselves. The ideas we hold must now be measured against a divine absolute. And the actions we commit must take God into account.

Read Hebrews 4:13

As Paul Little exclaims:

“There is in human existence no more profound question demanding an answer. ‘Is there a God?’ is the question that must be answered by every human being, and the answer is far-reaching in its implications for every individual.”³

The Reason for the Hope

In **1 Peter 3:15**, Peter tells us:

“...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

The beginning of any explanation of “the reason for the hope that you have” is your belief in:

- The existence of God
- The rewarding nature of God

Read Hebrews 11:6

It is not enough just to believe in God's existence. You must also believe, as *The Message* puts it, "that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him." Without these two beliefs, there is no hope for you to share. Indeed, without them we are literally "without hope and without God in the world" (**Ephesians 2:12**).

Therefore the reason for the hope you have is founded firmly in your understanding of God. It is because of God that you have hope. It is because of what God is like that your hope is certain.

But God does not just want you to be certain of the hope that you have. He wants you to be able to communicate that hope clearly and effectively to the one who demands the reason for your hope. Note what Peter continues to say in **1 Peter 3:15-16**:

"...But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

Just because the Bible says, "The *fool* says in his heart, "There is no God," does not mean you should go around calling every atheist a fool. Although the "morally deficient" says, "There is no God," and uses this as an excuse to live outside the moral bounds God has set, this does not mean that every atheist is "morally deficient." There are different kinds of atheists:

- Those who have rejected a belief in God for *moral* reasons
- Those who have rejected a belief in God for *emotional* reasons

There really is no other kind of atheist. Let's have a look at these two reasons:

Those who have rejected a belief in God for moral reasons

Some atheists are motivated in their atheism principally by a desire to be loosed from the perceived strictures that come from a belief in God. Writer Aldous Huxley explained the foundations of his own atheism:

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics, he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves...For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political."⁴

Those who have rejected a belief in God for emotional reasons

In his book, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, philosopher Bertrand Russell gives the original reason for his atheism. When he was a child, "God" was given as the answer to the many questions he raised. But when he asked, "Well, who created God?," no one could answer him. This lack of an answer shattered him. "My entire faith collapsed!" he wrote.⁵

Although much of his book seeks to provide a rational basis for his disbelief in God (in general) and in the Christian faith (in particular), the original reason for Russell's rejection of a belief in God was not rational but emotional. If someone had taken the time to explain to him that God, by very definition, is eternal and uncreated – that if God had been created, he would not and could not be God – the emotional devastation of that early crisis of faith may have been averted.

The majority of atheists fall into this category. No one starts out life as an atheist, for an atheist is not simply *ignorant* of God, as a child may be, but has made the deliberate decision *not to believe* in God. The reason for this decision may be an emotional trauma such as the death of a loved one – “How could a God have allowed my mother to die like that?” – or an encounter with suffering or loss in the world – “I can't believe in a God who allows children to die of hunger.” Sadly, many have also been driven to atheism because of the hypocrisy or outright evil actions of Christians – “I was molested by a priest as a child; how can I believe in the God he preached on Sunday?”

The foundations of atheism are not intellectual, but moral or emotional. Atheism is simply the rational framework that is built upon a moral or emotional decision to reject a belief in God. The arguments for atheism may be strongly intellectual, but the root of atheism is not.

Nine Possible Beliefs About God

Belief (or disbelief) in God is not black and white, however. It is not just a matter of someone believing in God or not. It is also a matter of what *kind* of God they believe in.

There are nine main perceptions of the divine. We'll look briefly at each in turn.

Theism

Theism is defined as “belief in a personal God capable of making Himself known by supernatural revelation.”⁶ God is separate from and beyond the universe he has created, yet still personally involved in the affairs of the human race, for which he has an ongoing interest. Theism can also be called monotheism, which means the belief in one and only one God. The theology of the Bible is theistic and monotheistic in nature.

Deism

Like the theist, the deist believes in an eternal God separate from yet responsible for the universe. But unlike the theist, the deist does not believe in a personal God, and thus rejects the possibility of divine revelation or intervention into human affairs. Thomas Jefferson is one example of a prominent deist.

Pantheism

Pantheism is the belief that “the whole universe is God, or that every part of the universe is a manifestation of God.”⁷ As Paul Davies describes it, “God is identified with nature itself: everything is art of God, and God is in everything.”⁸ Pan-

theism is the theology that underlies New Age philosophy and finds its roots in Hindu and Buddhist thought.

Polytheism

Polytheism is the belief in multiple gods. This is the ancient pagan belief system, but is still believed by a significant portion of the modern world, including peoples in China, Japan, Korea, India, Thailand, Burma, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Animism

Animism is the belief that “all objects, even inanimate things, possess life and are endowed with souls.”⁹ Many African and Asian people are animists, even though in name they may give credence to another religion. A Thai, for example, may be a Buddhist in theology (which is pantheistic), but polytheistic/animist in practice.

Atheism

As we have already seen, atheism is the denial of the existence of God – not just the God of the Bible, but any divine being whatsoever. Many atheists, however, are also antitheists. They don’t simply deny God’s existence; they are aggressive in their propagation of this disbelief.

Agnosticism

An agnostic is one who denies that it is possible to know anything about God – his existence or his nature. In this sense, a true agnostic is not one who simply says, “I don’t know if God exists,” but rather one who says, “It’s impossible to know whether God exists or not.”

Dualism

Dualism is a word that describes many different philosophical views, but as it pertains to God, it refers to the belief that the divine are two equal and opposing forces – good and evil. Dualism undergirds, for example, the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, and in another form, can be found in Taoism, where the yin and the yang are seen as perfect opposites.*

Demiurgism

This is a modern form of an ancient Greek concept, propounded by Plato. As Paul Davies describes it: “...a number of scientists have proposed a type of God who evolves within the universe, eventually becoming so powerful he resembles Plato’s Demiurge. One can envisage, for example, intelligent life or even machine intelligence gradually becoming more advanced and spreading throughout the cosmos, gaining control over larger and larger portions until its manipulation of matter and energy is so refined that this intelligence would be indistinguishable from nature itself. Such a God-like intelligence could develop from our own descendants...”

* In the case of Taoism, yin and yang are not seen as good and evil, but rather the harmony between opposing forces.

Some of these scientists even speculate on what they cause “backward causation,” which simply means that super-intelligent life evolves toward God-like status at the end of the universe, and then moves backward in time to set off the whole process of creation in a massive “causal loop.” In other words, potentially we (or, more accurately, our descendants) turn out to be God!

There are countless variations of these nine basic concepts of God. Needless to say, the God revealed in Scripture is a personal, eternally self-existent God, independent of nature and above time and space. This is the God who is the basis of the hope you have in Christ.

Can I Prove That God Exists?

Occasionally someone will throw down the gauntlet: “Prove to me that God exists!” Is it possible to provide incontrovertible proof that God does indeed exist – proof that will convince the most hardened skeptic? The answer is both yes and no – yes, there is proof, but no, nothing that will convince someone who is already convinced that God does not exist.

To begin with it should be stated that in asking for a proof of God’s existence, the skeptic is not looking for an answer from the Bible. This, he would say, is “circular reasoning.”* What the skeptic is wanting is *external* proof – a proof based on logic that cannot be denied.

What *cannot* be provided is scientific proof. Science, by its very nature, can only measure measurable things. Yet God is beyond the scope of science. As Paul Little describes it:

“...it is not possible to put God in a test tube or prove Him by the usual scientific methodology. And it can be said with equal emphasis that it is not possible to *prove* Napoleon by the scientific method. The reason lies in the nature of history itself, and in the limitations of the scientific method. In order for something to be *proved* by the scientific method, it must be repeatable...But history by its very nature is nonrepeatable. No one can *rerun* the beginning of the universe or bring Napoleon back or repeat the assassination of Lincoln or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But the fact that these events can’t be *proved* by repetition does not disprove their reality as events.”¹⁰

But this doesn’t mean, however, that there are no logical proofs. Remember: No one is asking anyone to “just believe.” We believe because there is compelling evidence to believe. We believe because it is foolish not to.

Although ultimately the Bible is our yardstick for knowing God (and in the next lesson we will see why the Bible is a credible yardstick to use), there have been many logical proofs proposed using reason rather than revelation. Most of them, however, are impractically academic and of no use for the man on the street. Of

* Circular reasoning means arguing in a circle. The first argument provides a proof for the second argument, which then provides a proof for the first argument.

the simplest and the best, three are worthwhile using:

- The common belief principle
- The causation principle
- The design principle

Let's take a look at each.

The common belief principle

If the Bible says that God made man in his image (**Genesis 1:26**), then we would expect to see a reflection of God in mankind. Indeed, anthropology has shown that among even the most remote and primitive peoples, there is a universal belief in the existence of God – one God who created all things. Even in polytheistic and animistic societies, some of the earliest legends bear witness to a monotheistic belief in a Creator God. As Paul Little explains:

“[Anthropological] research, in the last fifty years, has challenged the evolutionary concept of the development of religion, which had suggested that monotheism – the concept of one God – was the apex of gradual development that began with polytheistic concepts. It is increasingly clear that the oldest traditions everywhere were of one supreme God.”¹¹

While the common belief principle can not be provided as conclusive proof of the existence of God, it must be taken into account by anyone seriously seeking to know whether God exists or not.

The causation principle

Any serious investigation of the nature of the universe will come to a disturbing conclusion: the universe cannot explain itself. Its existence depends on something outside of itself, at the very least in its creation. Evolution does not and cannot account for the universe's existence. At the very most it may account for certain processes within the universe after its creation (something we will investigate in **ES108-04**).

So where did the universe come from? We know that nothing happens within the universe without a cause, and each cause must have a cause. So if you trace every event backward along a great chain of cause and effect, you will eventually have to reach a point in time before which there is no cause. What is this causeless cause? The philosophical term that is often used for this starting event is the First Cause – a pseudonym for God.

The design principle

The skeptic might say: “If God really wants us to discover him, why doesn't he write a fiery message across the sky for us to see?” The answer is, of course, that he has. **Psalm 19:1-4** tells us:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display

knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

Wherever we look in the universe, we see evidence of design. And wherever we see design, we know there must be a designer. If we look at the intricate workings of a watch, for example, we know that a talented watchmaker has been at work. You may not have met the watchmaker, but the watchmaker can be deduced from the watch.

One of the most amazing things about the universe is just how logically consistent it is. Everything works according to finely tuned mathematical formulas that amaze our best scientific minds with their simplicity and elegance. Why should it be this way? Why should we live in an ordered and mathematically exact universe, instead of one that is haphazard, chaotic and totally un conducive to life?

Paul Davies voices this amazement, even from the perspective of evolutionary theory:

“...the existence of complexity in nature seems to be very finely balanced, so that even small changes in the form of the laws would apparently prevent this complexity from arising. A careful study suggests that the laws of the universe are remarkably felicitous for the emergence of richness and variety. In the case of living organisms, their existence seems to depend upon a number of fortuitous coincidences that some scientists and philosophers have hailed as nothing short of astonishing.”¹²

Contrary to common belief, the majority of scientists believe in God. They may not believe in the God of the Bible, but most do not subscribe to atheism. Einstein, for example, was a deist. For him, the heavens did indeed declare the glory of God, but he had no personal experience with the Creator of the universe he admired. He once commented:

“My religion consists of a humble adoration of the illuminant superior Spirit who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds.”¹³

Hugh Ross reports that astronomers “have discovered that the characteristics of the universe, of our galaxy and of our solar system are so finely tuned to support life that the only reasonable explanation for this is the forethought of a personal, intelligent Creator whose involvement explains the degree of finetunedness. It requires power and purpose.”¹⁴

Some scientists, however, try to use theories of evolutionary development to remove the need for a Creator. These theories depend on two things – infinite time and selective chance – to explain the origins of the universe and of life. The distinguished astronomer, Sir Fred Hoyle, proposed a series of arguments that reveal the fallacy of these God-less theories. He provides two analogies:

- In the human body, there are 200,000 different protein chains. The time required for all 200,000 proteins to come together by chance is estimated

at 1.35 trillion years – almost 100 times the estimated age of the universe, according to current cosmological theory!

- Hoyle likens the chances of life coming about by chance to a tornado sweeping through a junkyard and accidentally assembling a 747 jumbo jet and leaving it ready for take off.

Needless to say, Hoyle finds attempts to explain the universe without God to be ludicrous. In his book, *The Intelligent Universe*, he writes:

“As biochemists discover more and more about the awesome complexity of life, it is apparent that its chances of originating by accident are so minute that they can be completely ruled out. Life *cannot* have arisen by chance.”¹⁵

In fact, so fine-tuned are the laws of physics, Hoyle describes the universe as a “put-up” job, as though somebody had been “monkeying” with the laws of physics in such a way as to sustain life.¹⁶ In fact, every scientific discipline uncovers coincidences so extraordinary that to list them is like showing God’s fingerprints upon his creation.

B. C. Johnson, in *The Atheist Debater’s Handbook*, lays down this challenge:

“If God exists, there will be evidence of this; signs will emerge which point to such a conclusion.”¹⁷

Indeed, the signs are there for those who would look. Yet for many a skeptic, they will never be convincing. It could be argued, however, that there is no better proof of God’s existence than that of a life changed by him. Your testimony is something no one can negate. For what you are sharing is not just the *reason* for the hope, but the *hope itself*. You are sharing not just that God exists, but that he has demonstrated his love for you by intervening in your life. You are the best proof that you can give to anyone. For the God that you love and serve is indeed a personal God “who rewards those who earnestly seek him” (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Without Hope and Without God

The inescapable fact, proven time and time again in the lives of people, is that atheism is a one-way ticket to despair and futility. Biologist Jacques Monod, a proponent of the life-by-chance theory exclaimed:

“The ancient covenant is in pieces. Man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he has emerged only by chance. Neither his destiny nor his duty have been written down.”¹⁸

Physicist Steven Weinberg echoes this sentiment:

“The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”¹⁹

It is this momentum toward despair and futility that shows atheism to be truly bankrupt as a philosophy and as a lifestyle. A quick survey of the final words of

famous atheists provides a fitting epitaph to atheistic thought. Sartre described atheism as “cruel.” Camus found it “dreadful.” Nietzsche called it “maddening.” Gordon Childe, author of the book, *Man Makes Himself*, ended his life by jumping from a cliff, his glasses neatly folded near the ledge from which he leapt.

The seventeenth century mathematician, Blaise Pascal, declared that there is a “God-shaped vacuum” inside every person. When you share with a skeptic, you are most successful when you appeal, not just to the mind, but to the “God-shaped vacuum” within the soul.

In his address to the Athenian philosophers, Paul declared in **Acts 17:24-27**:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands...From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. *God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him*, though he is not far from each one of us.”

God is a God who has made himself accessible. He is to be found by those that would seek him, as **Hebrews 11:6** declares. And so to the skeptic’s challenge comes a counter-challenge:

“Are you willing to reach out, to seek God with all of your heart and soul and strength, to find out for yourself if he really exists? For if you are, you *will* find him.”

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- ¹ *New International Version* margin notes, Psalm 14:1, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.
 - ² Mortimus Adler, *Great Ideas Syntopicon*, quoted by Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1997), p.21.
 - ³ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1997), p.21.
 - ⁴ Aldous Huxley, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), p.xli.
 - ⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, quoted by Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1997), p.21.
 - ⁶ *Webster Universal Dictionary*, Unabridged International Edition.
 - ⁷ *Webster Universal Dictionary*, Unabridged International Edition.
 - ⁸ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1992), p.43.
 - ⁹ *Webster Universal Dictionary*, Unabridged International Edition.
 - ¹⁰ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1997), p.22.
 - ¹¹ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1997), p.22.
 - ¹² Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1992), p.195.
 - ¹³ Albert Einstein, quoted by Lincoln Barnett, *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p.95.
 - ¹⁴ Hugh Ross, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), p.lii.
 - ¹⁵ Fred Hoyle, *The Intelligent Universe* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), p.251.
 - ¹⁶ Fred Hoyle, quoted by Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1992), p.199.
 - ¹⁷ B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook*, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), p.liii.
 - ¹⁸ Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, translated by A. Wainhouse (London: Collins, 1972), p.167.
 - ¹⁹ Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (London: Andre Deutch, 1977), p.149.

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