



## Lesson 4 – Does God Exist?

*“He that cometh to God must believe that he is...” (Hebrews 11:6)*

*“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exodus 3:14)*

Few questions can shake the confidence of a Christian quite like the question of God’s existence. Believers often wrestle with questions of God’s goodness, God’s sovereignty, and God’s love. Such struggles can be long and dark, but there is something especially awful about wrestling over the question of God’s very existence. Unbelievers will sometimes use the question of God’s existence as an excuse to continue in their sins and avoid coming to Christ. Satan’s first question to humanity is a question that he continues to whisper in the ear of God’s children “Did God really say?” Yet if he can get away with it he loves to move back a step and ask “Actually, is there even a God to say anything in the first place?” All this at times raises the important question that needs to be answered, “Does God exist?”

***If someone was to ask you “How can I know God exists?” what would you tell them?***

Although most people in America today believe in some sort of God,<sup>1</sup> there are some who question God’s existence. These responses range from struggling believers to agnostics – “I don’t know if there is a God” – to atheists – “I don’t think there is a God.”<sup>2</sup> In this lesson, we will seek to answer this question by first looking at several major arguments for God’s existence, and then looking at how the Bible discusses God existence. Finally, we will give some practical help for having discussions with people about this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a 2018 Pew Research Center study, 8 in 10 Americans believe in some sort of God. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean/>

<sup>2</sup> Some will argue that there is no such thing as an atheist, since no one can know for sure that God doesn’t exist given the vastness of the universe. Once an atheist admits they don’t know everything and that there might possibly be a God even if they find it highly unlikely, the apologist will then smile and say, “So really you are an agnostic.” While it is helpful to point out to people that there is much we don’t know and this line of reasoning might help with someone who is arrogantly entrenched in their opinion, typically this is a “gotcha” response that scores points but doesn’t persuade souls. A response like this might cause frustration and shut down a conversation, not because God’s Word is doing its convicting work, but because the debate is being won on a technicality. It is also possible for the atheist to define his terms carefully and say, “An agnostic is someone who isn’t persuaded one way or the other, an atheist is someone who believes the evidence tilts in favor against there being a God, even while acknowledging that he could be wrong.”

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## The Classical Arguments for God's Existence

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Philosophers and theologians have thought carefully about the existence of God for a long time and have developed many arguments for the existence of God.<sup>3</sup> We will examine three of the main arguments that are used, examining both the arguments and the Scriptural support for each.

### The Argument from Creation<sup>4</sup>

One of the main arguments for God's existence is, ironically enough, our existence. The fact that anything exists instead of nothing existing points to a Creator. Aristotle was one of the first to argue along these lines, in what he calls "the unmoved mover" or "first cause." A simple way to explain this is to say that everything happens in response to something else, which also happens in response to something else, all the way back to the very beginning. Something had to be there to move first, or nothing would be moving now. Many Christians are not friendly to "the big bang" given the evolutionary association but believe it or not when the big bang was first suggested it was seen as a defeat for naturalism. Many people, including Einstein, wanted to believe the universe had simply always existed, but the big bang proved that there was a starting point to the universe.

The Bible certainly teaches that God is the cause for everything that exists. In Genesis 1:1 we read "God created the heavens and the earth." Paul argued that God is the Creator when debating with pagans, pointing out that even their poets recognized the importance of God for sustaining life (Acts 17:24, 28). Romans 1 and Psalm 19 both glory in the fact that God's creation points to God. The Bible repeatedly argues that creation points back to the Creator.

***How would you respond to someone who simply said, "I still just think the universe has always existed?" or "We simply don't know what preceded the big bang, but that doesn't necessarily mean it was God."***

### The Argument from Design<sup>5</sup>

Some atheists and agnostics have argued a view they call "the God of the gaps." In this understanding, God functions merely to explain the things that primitive people didn't understand. "Why is there rain? We don't know, must be God did it!" "How did everything get here? God must have made it!" "Why can some people have children and others not? Why do people get sick and either get better or die? God does it!" People who hold to this view then argue that since we know how these things work, we don't really have a need for God anymore.

But the opposite is true. The more we know about the complex world in which we live, the more we realize that things didn't just happen. The world is far more complex and fine-tuned than earlier generations could have imagined, and that incredible complexity demands an intelligent Creator. One famous atheist, Antony Flew, converted to a form of deism as a result of this very argument. After decades of arguing

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<sup>3</sup> One apologetics resource lists 20 arguments for the existence of God! *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, pages 47-88.

<sup>4</sup> This is normally called the "cosmological argument," meaning the argument from the cosmos (i.e. creation).

<sup>5</sup> This is normally called the "teleological argument," from the Greek word *telos* which means end or purpose.

against God, he reluctantly accepted that Someone had to have made all of this. When asked what changed his mind he stated, “There were two factors in particular that were decisive. One was my growing empathy with the insight of Einstein and other noted scientists that there had to be an Intelligence behind the integrated complexity of the physical Universe. The second was my own insight that the integrated complexity of life itself—which is far more complex than the physical Universe—can only be explained in terms of an Intelligent Source. I believe that the origin of life and reproduction simply cannot be explained from a biological standpoint despite numerous efforts to do so. With every passing year, the more that was discovered about the richness and inherent intelligence of life, the less it seemed likely that a chemical soup could magically generate the genetic code... No, I did not hear a Voice. It was the evidence itself that led me to this conclusion.”<sup>6</sup>

***Are you aware of any examples of complexity that are impossible to explain without God?***

***Why do you think it is that this argument does not persuade more people?***

Many of the passage from the previous section apply here as well. Romans 1:19-20 in particular argues that God is seen through His creation. Many other passages celebrate God as the Creator and marvel at His ability to organize the world, such as Job 38-42. Romans 11:36 states that “of [from] him, and through him, and to him, are all things.” In other words God created everything, everything exists because of God, and all things belong to and bring glory to God.

***How can believers practically remind themselves of God’s goodness and care in the way He has created and continues to sustain the world?***

### **The Argument from Morality**

Everyone believes certain things are wrong. They may define right and wrong differently, but everyone believes that some things should be done and other should not be done. And we expect that others should subscribe to and follow our view of morality, even if they don’t. If everyone in the world believes in morality, then morality must come from somewhere or Someone. If there is a universal law, there must be a universal Judge.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible teaches that man does indeed have a moral code written in his heart, and that moral code comes from God (Romans 2:14-16). Even after the fall, fragments of God’s truth remain the hearts of unbelievers and pagans. These fragments point to a Divine Lawgiver who not only tells us what is right and wrong but is also able to hold us to that standard. Without God, there is no ground for morality and there is no enforcement of morality.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Benjamin Wiker for Strange Notions: <https://strangenotions.com/flew/>

<sup>7</sup> One of the more famous and well-argued examples of this line of reasoning is the opening of *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis.

This argument is often misunderstood by opponents of Christianity and theism in general. It's not uncommon for an atheist to hear this argument and to respond, "That's just not true. I am a very moral person, and some of the worst people I know are Christians!"

***What is wrong with this critique of the argument?***

Such a response fails to understand what Christians are claiming. This argument is not saying that atheists are worse people because they have no morality, it argues that they have no *basis* for morality. That might seem like a small distinction, but it matters. The very fact that your atheist friend is arguing with you that he believes in morality is inconsistent with his worldview. If we are truly just atoms bumping into each other, then no one *should* do anything, they simply do what the firing neurons tell them to do and one day the universe will end in heat death and that will be it.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Bible's Teaching on God's Existence**

When we come to the Bible's arguments for the existence of God, we find a strange silence. The Bible has a lot to say about God, and even as we went through the arguments for the existence of God, we found that Scripture at several points supported some of their claims. But the Bible itself never sets out to try to convince anyone that God exists. Part of this is because of the context in which Scripture is written. Polytheism – the worship of many gods – was the problem facing Paul, Peter, and John, not atheism.

But beyond that, the Bible doesn't so much teach that God exists as it assumes that He exists, and that people know He exists. How can we say this if there are people walking around saying they don't believe God exists? Are they lying? Yes, essentially. They are self-deceived. Romans 1 describes this process well, both the fact that people know there is a God, and they suppress that knowledge.

### **The Bible Teaches that Everyone Knows God (Romans 1:19-20)**

Paul is opening his argument about why everyone needs the gospel, and he starts with the pagans. He shows that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against those who know about God but reject that knowledge and replace it with idolatry. Although the issue we are dealing with is slightly different here (atheism versus idolatry), at the heart the same thing is happening. People know truth about God intrinsically, but they go on to reject that truth.

***What does this passage say can be known about God from creation?***

### **The Bible Teaches that Everyone Rejects God (Romans 1:21-25)**

The knowledge of God is like a beach ball in a pool. You can suppress it, hold it under the water, and try to keep it from rising back to the surface. But odds are it will eventually slip free and come shooting back up to the surface. Man's rejection of God is like holding down that beach ball. He tries to convince himself that God is not real, but the testimony to God is screaming at him from all around.

***According to this passage, why do people reject God?***

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<sup>8</sup> In apologetics, this debate is referred to as the *is* and the *ought*. For the atheist, there is no way to go from what is (i.e. what exists) to what ought to be (i.e. how people should or shouldn't behave).

*According to this passage, what is God's response when people reject Him?*

*According to this passage, what is the result of rejecting God?*

## Help for Conversations about God's Existence

All of this is very interesting. The fact that anything at all exists proves God's existence, as does the design we see in the universe and the reality that we all follow a moral code. The Bible teaches that people know more about God than they let on, but instead of responding to their God with gratitude they respond with pride and reject Him. But how do we share all of this? How do we interact with people who claim to not believe in God or are struggling with whether or not God exists?

### Discussions with Believers

*How would you help a friend who came to you and let you know that they are struggling with the existence of God?*

Many Christians will live much if not all their lives simply accepting that God exists. For some, a dark season of doubt will be a burden they will need to bear.

- **See this doubt for what it is – spiritual warfare.**

If a believer is struggling with whether God exists, this is more than an intellectual curiosity, it is a spiritual battle. Realizing this will help someone to take the proper steps in how to respond.

- **Use the weapons at your disposal – prayer and the Word.**

We talked in our previous lesson about how to respond to spiritual battles. The evidences we have gone over can be of some help, and logic will have its place. But since this is a spiritual battle, the main weapons of the Word and prayer will be crucial. Don't stop reading God's Word if you struggle with doubts! Don't stop praying if you feel like your prayers are hitting the ceiling! Keep fighting the spiritual battle, even the battle of doubt.

- **Realize that battles may drag on and endure.**

Unwanted doubts may not go away overnight. A sincere believer might pray and read God's Word and yet still struggle with questions. But God is faithful. Be ready to pray for your friend and to encourage them and to be in it for the long haul. Spiritual battles may not be won in a day, but by God's grace they can be won.

### Discussions with Unbelievers

*How would you respond if you were sharing Christ with someone and they said, "I don't believe in God"?*

- **Pray that the Spirit would open blinded eyes.**

As with the believer, don't forget that this is a spiritual battle. And spiritual battles require Scripture, prayer, and the Spirit. Enter into conversations with humility, realizing you can't outsmart someone into believing in God, as well as courage, believing that God really can change a heart.

- **Point them to the creation as evidence of the Creator.**

The Bible does make clear that God makes Himself known to all through creation, so point back to the complexity, design, and wonder of the world as proof that God does exist.

- **Share the gospel with them anyway, trusting God's Word to do its work.**

To be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, don't believe them. The Bible says they do, in fact, believe in God, so share the gospel with them regardless. Sharing the Word and praying gives the Spirit a chance to push against their suppression, and given enough time, prayer, and evangelism even an atheist can be saved.