

Why I'm a Christian Week 1: God | Lexington

Good morning, my name is Brandon if I haven't met you yet. I'm one of the pastors here. Let's get right into it this morning. *How do we know God exists?* We're tackling some big questions in this series, and this is the starting point.

Why do you believe in God, yet you don't believe in the Easter bunny or the tooth fairy?

Do you want to base your life on blind faith, or on reason and science?

How do you believe in something you can't see or prove?

Or, of Richard Dawkins fame, *isn't belief in God ultimately the equivalent of believing in what he calls "the giant spaghetti monster in the sky?"*

I'm sure all of us have wrestled with these questions, or had conversations about them. Some of these questions are from genuine searchers, and others, like Richard Dawkins, are militant atheists lobbed like grenades in a war meant to make Christians feel stupid and ridicule religious people.

Amongst all of this are a lot of things that need to be untangled, which we'll spend time doing in this series. Sometimes these questions get confusing or overwhelming. Sometimes when you are talking about these questions you know there is something off in someone's argument, but you can't put your finger on why. So you end up feeling conflicted and confused, not sure what to think or say. You're like, "I know this is wrong...but I can't explain how..."

Our goal for this series is to help you untangle some of these things. We want to give you reasons from Scripture and reason to feel confident facing hard questions for yourself and with others.

Today we'll start with the question: How do we know God exists? Go ahead and turn to Romans 1. We will look at how the Bible answers this question.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, gospel, meaning what Jesus has done to make us right with God, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, "men" there is gender inclusive, so women you'll be happy to know that God's wrath is against you too... who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

As we start to answer this question and trace Paul's argument, there's an important distinction that needs to be made. Because sometimes when people start to think about this question they think about it in terms of "proof." How can you "prove" for a fact, like prove $2 + 2 = 4$, that God exists? So here's a caveat from the beginning: [This question is about evidence, not proof.]

People love to think they live their lives based on proof--the truth is, that's not how anyone lives their life, secular, atheist, or devoutly religious. It's not possible to live a life exclusively based on proof. Even the

idea that we should only believe what can be tested and proven is shot through with problems. For one, it can't meet its own standard. The statement "we should only believe that can be tested and proven" cannot be tested and proven..so why should we believe it? Second, while we might be able to demonstrably prove some things, there are a great many more we cannot. Take this quote from Tim Keller:

"We cannot prove what we believe about justice and human rights, or that all people are equal in dignity and worth, or what we think is good and evil human behavior. If we used the same standard of evidence that many secular people use to reject belief in God, no one would be able to justify much of anything." - Tim Keller

For someone who insisted on this line of reasoning, hit him in the face and when he objects simply say that because right and wrong can't be proven I don't base my life on them. So *why do you believe in right and wrong but not the Easter bunny or tooth fairy?*

You can't prove that you exist. You can't prove that your senses work correctly. We cannot test our senses without using them and therefore assuming their reliability. You might be hooked up to the Matrix.

There is virtually no one in the sphere of philosophy who believes this depiction of proof anymore, because it so quickly falls apart upon inspection. And yet, most secular people fall into its thinking by assuming that religious people are living by blind faith, while secular nonbelievers in God are grounding their position in evidence and reason. Tim Keller chimes in again...

"Reason is a crucial and irreplaceable way to help us with competing beliefs. But it is impossible to claim that we should believe only what is proven and that therefore, since religion can't be proven, we shouldn't embrace it. All of us have things we believe – including things we would sacrifice and even die for - that cannot be proven. We should, therefore, stop demanding that belief in God meet a standard of universally acknowledged proof when we don't apply that to the other commitments on which we base our lives." - Tim Keller

Here is how Neil Shenvi - a theoretical chemist, says it...Arguments for God's existence... *"...should not be viewed as 'proofs' of God but as 'evidence' for God. Why? Because 'proof' is generally relegated to the field of mathematics. Speaking as a professional scientist myself, I can attest that scientists rarely demand 'proof' that theories are true. Instead, scientists and those in many other fields such as economics, medicine, and archaeology seek the best explanation for the evidence that they have. When considering arguments for God's existence, we should not demand 'proof' but should instead ask ourselves "Which worldview is the best explanation of the evidence provided?"*

That's the category we are operating in. Not proof, but evidence. Yet still, we find in Romans 1 that Paul asserts we can *know* God exists. He asserts that enough evidences are given for us to confidently know that God exists and sleep soundly at night. Not proof because that is not the category we're in, but deep, confident knowledge.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

What can be known about God, meaning his eternal power and divine nature, God has shown to us already. The word there for 'made plain' can be translated "made evident." God has put the evidence out there. And remember that is what we are looking for. Not proof, but evidence. *Which theory, or worldview, is the best explanation of the evidence?*

Paul is saying if you look out at the natural world, nature, the created world, you can see a lot of evidence that God exists, his divine power and his divine nature. Some of you have learned these arguments

before, and they are very compelling arguments. They're very, very old. They go back to Aristotle. They've been redone and reworked by people like Anselm and Aquinas, and modern theologians have only gotten more evidence and examples as we've gathered more information about the world.

These arguments say "If you look out there at the natural world, that is strong, conclusive evidence that there is a God." The two that probably would be the most tied to these verses would be the *cosmological argument* and the *teleological argument*. The cosmological argument goes like this:

I. Cosmological argument - "an argument from something rather than nothing"

The argument goes like this:

- 1) Everything comes from something. Cause precedes effect.
- 2) The universe exists.
- 3) Some outside force must have caused the universe to exist.

This one goes back all the way to Aristotle. It's the question of why there is something rather than nothing, and where did the original something come from? If the world began 14 billion years ago with a Big Bang, where did the materials that caused the Big Bang come from? You can't keep going back in infinite regress into nothingness. That's cheating and illogical. Eventually something has to come from somewhere. "Nothingness" can't just explode.

In his book *God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins admits this is a problem. He says, ["*Darwin's theory works for biology, but not for cosmology (or, ultimate origins).*" And, "*Cosmology is waiting on its Darwin.*"]

In other words, he thinks that while they have explained how life took shape on the earth, he admits they still have no idea where life itself, or the materials that produced life, came from. We need a theory, he says, as to why anything exists, because it is self-evident that nothing x nobody can't equal everything. (And before I show you this next quote, I want you to know it is an actual quote from an actual theologian.)

Apologist Greg Koukl said, "*If there's a Big Bang, there needs to be someone who caused the bang...a Big Bang needs a Big Banger. Some powerful personal intelligence outside of nature and beyond the space-time continuum had to "pull the trigger."*

Another Christian philosopher used this analogy: Suppose you were hiking through the forest and came upon a ball lying on the ground. You would wonder how it came to be there. If your hiking buddy said to you, "*Forget about it! It just exists. There was nothing and now there is this.*" You would think he was either joking or just wanted you to keep moving. No one would take seriously the idea that the ball just exists without any explanation. Now notice that increasing the size of the ball until it becomes the size of the universe does nothing to either provide, or remove the need for, an explanation of its existence.

[Whatever begins to exist has a cause. (nothing can't just become something). The universe began to exist. Our universe has a cause.] Is it proof? No. It's evidence...evidence that must be accounted for in whatever theory we ascribe to. It's one of the ways that the knowledge of God is made plain since the creation of the world, as Romans 1 says.

II. Teleological argument - "an argument from design"

- 1) The world has a meticulous design.
- 2) Anything with a design is made by a designer.
- 3) Therefore, the universe has a designer.

Teleos means purpose. Our creation appears very finely tuned, for a purpose. The more we learn about this, the more amazing it becomes. This is an argument that discovery has made even more compelling recently. Life on earth depends on multiple factors that are so precise that if they were off by even a hair, life could not exist. They call it the Goldilocks principle: things are "just right" for human life.

It makes me think of the classic film Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Secret from the Ooze from 1991. One of the turtles, Raphael, has been kidnapped. And the other 3 turtles are going to break him out. When they show up to the place he's being held, they see no guards. One of them says "it sure is quiet" "yeah a little too quiet". Then they beat up a few helpless foot soldiers and one of them says "well that was easy". "Yeah a little too easy." And then they see their friend Raphael and one of them says "look, there's Raph!" and one responds "yeah, a little too Raph!" And 6 year old me thought that was the best comedic writing that the world had ever been blessed with. It turns out, it was a trap. The point is, even Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles know they should be suspicious when they come upon conditions that seem too convenient.

For example: The makeup of our atmosphere. (78% Nitrogen, 21% Oxygen, 0.5% Argon, 0.03% Carbon Dioxide.) If some of those levels were even slightly off—for example, if the level of oxygen dropped by 6% we would all suffocate; if it rose by 4%, our planet would erupt into a giant fireball. And we'd all die.

Or, if the CO₂ were just a little higher (let's say, 3%) or a just little bit lower (say, 0.01%), then the earth would either become an oven or have no atmosphere at all. And we'd all die.

Or this: The water molecule is the only molecule whose solid form (ice) is less dense than its liquid form. Which means that when it freezes it floats. If ice did not float, it would sink to the bottom and the whole ocean would eventually freeze from the bottom up and... we would all die.

Or the distance of the earth from the sun: If we were 2% closer to the sun, the planet would be too hot for water to exist. And... we'd all die.

And then there's tilt of the earth, which is set at an ideal 23.5 degrees, which we've learned is perfect for temperatures and tides and such. You've probably never thought about it, but if it was not tilted, temperatures would be extreme and WE'D ALL DIE. At least the humans.

We've learned that if Jupiter wasn't the size and in the orbit it is, astronomers predict that there would be 10,000x the number of asteroid strikes right here on earth, and....._____?? WE'D ALL DIE. Without Jupiter, our planet would be pummeled with asteroids and life could never exist. Let's give it up for Jupiter you guys.

Then we put up our telescopes and pull out our microscopes and we find the same complexity in the cell and atomic structure: *"Even the most basic DNA strands are incredibly complex, enough so that Francis Collins, head of the human genome project, says "How could a cosmic accident ever result in something of this digital elegance of a DNA strand?" "DNA, with its phosphate-sugar backbone and intricately arranged organic bases, stacked neatly on top of one another and paired together at each rung of the twisted double helix, seems an utterly improbable molecule to have 'just happened'—especially since DNA seems to possess no intrinsic means of copying itself."* —Francis Collins, "The Language of God,"

One philosopher said It's like thinking an explosion in an ink factory could inadvertently produce the collected works of Shakespeare. That takes some faith right there.

The late Stephen Hawking said in one of his later books, *"The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many (precise ratios), like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life."* Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*

The argument against this evidence typically some version of *"we're just lucky. In a universe as big as ours, our planet was bound to exist somewhere and we just happen to be on it. Of course we find ourselves existing on a planet suited for our existence. No matter the improbability of something*

happening, once it happens it's a certainty." And of course there are arguments for a multiverse...millions of universes out there so of course at some point, the one we find ourselves in comes to be.

Well, you've still got to answer the question of origins for said multiverse. That doesn't solve anything. And on top of that, there is not a shred of evidence that a multiverse exists. It could exist. But there is no reason to think it does other than science fiction movies or DC comics.

And the problem is, the odds of a planet like ours existing is so ridiculously low you have to defy all common sense to think it just happened. Alvin Plantinga, Philosophy Professor, gives this illustration to his class...Imagine you're in Texas and you're playing poker with a bunch of cowboys. You're dealing. Four times in a row you deal yourself four aces. Well, that fourth time they start to get their pistols out. You say, *"Wait! There are trillions of universes, so the chances are in one of them all of these things happen by accident. We just happen to be in the one where I always deal myself four aces."* They're going to shoot you. Okay? I've seen Westerns...cowboys don't play.

The reason they're going to shoot you is that even though it is *possible* all of that happened by accident, it's incredibly unreasonable to assume that. It's much more reasonable to assume it was deliberate. Therefore, it's possible that human life and matter came about by accident here, but isn't it unreasonable to base your life on the idea that the one in a trillion chance happened?

That's the teleological argument. [*Our world has a design. Anything with a design has a designer. Therefore, the world has a designer.*]

Transition → So those are two of the arguments for the existence of God that come from observable creation, as Paul says here in Romans. There are a good many more and we've got those resources available for you on the website. [WhyImaChristian.com] Things like the regularity of nature, human consciousness. There's even one about math. It referenced Nobel Prize speech called *"the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the natural sciences"* and I don't understand a single word of it. I mean, not a single word.

There are some good arguments to consider and for some people, these sort of external arguments are persuasive. You know they are powerful because all the new atheist books deal with them. They wouldn't deal with an argument unless they felt it had some force. Maybe someone in the room right now is thinking *"You know, I was an atheist but I didn't know about Jupiter. Now that you told me about Jupiter, there must be a God!"*

For others of us though, these sorts of arguments might not really move the needle. We don't find them persuasive. And what interesting is that this sort of argument is not actually the main point Paul is making in Romans 1. He says, the knowledge of God is made known through creation, but that's not his main point.

When you ask Paul "How do you know God exists? His answer is that you can know rationally by looking at the world...but you already know intuitively. You already know that God exists. Everyone does. Look at verse 18.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Underline suppress the truth 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, underline plain to them because God has shown it to them. underline has shown it to them 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, underline have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God

Then later on Verse 24. it says, *"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie."* Over and over here it says all human beings already know there's a God, even if we won't admit it to ourselves. That's Paul's point. He says it is absolutely basic to the human condition that everybody knows deep down that there is a God. That we know this intuitively. The vast majority of people in the world believe in God. They always have, and they haven't done it by working through the cosmological and teleological arguments.

Everybody actually already knows there's a God intuitively. This is how everyone who has ever existed knows God exists. It's much the same as how you know you exist intuitively, and you're not a part of some video game. The problem is, we don't want to know. So we suppress the truth that know. This reality is too unsettling, too traumatic...so we suppress it. We know, but we don't want to know, so we don't know.

You wanted to talk philosophy, but Paul is taking you to therapy. He's talking about repressed knowledge. His assertion is, that everyone knows God is there, eternal, powerful creator, and we know what that means. It means we owe him everything.

But because of our sin, human beings do not want to admit we are completely dependent on God for everything, that he keeps us alive every second, that everything we have belongs to him. We shouldn't make a move without asking him. We hate the fact that means we lose all control. We hate the knowledge of the true God, so we hold it down and repress it. That's what every single one of us has done.

Now, there are multiple ways to suppress the knowledge of the true God because it's so traumatic. You can say "There is no God." and you get to keep control of your life. Or you can just come up with a view of God that lets you live any way you want. You could say, "I believe in a god of love who just loves everyone and accepts everyone." That's just as good as not believing in God...because you keep control. In both cases, you're suppressing the truth.

Very few people know that they are doing that. Most of us fancy ourselves as neutral, bi partisan, dispassionate, unbiased. We might like to think we're objectively weighing the evidence, but we are most certainly not. Some happen to know it, like philosopher Thomas Nagel at NYU. Here's what he says in his book *The Last Word*.

He says, [*"I want atheism to be true. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and naturally hope that I'm right in my belief; it's that I hope there is no God. I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. I'm curious whether there's anyone who could genuinely be indifferent as to whether there is a God.*]

What he says is, "I don't want there to be a God, because then I have to change the way in which I live, and I can't imagine anybody is actually objective about this subject." That's exactly what Paul is saying. Of course nobody is objective. I'm so glad that philosopher is willing to come out and say it. He says, "If there is a God, I am not objective when I consider that. I'm not objective at all. It means totally losing control of my life if it's there. I don't want there to be a universe like that."

Let me quickly give you a couple of arguments to defend the claim that everyone already knows there is a God. Not just an argument for God's existence but an argument that we all already know he exists.

III. Moral argument - "an argument from ought"

- 1) There is a universal Moral Law.
- 2) If there is a universal Moral Law, there is a Moral Law-giver.

This one isn't as much about premises and conclusions because it's grounded in what you already know.

Is there anything happening in the world that you think is wrong? If you say “yes”, which everyone does...then you know there’s a God. There is more that could be unpacked, but the argument is really that simple.

We all have moral feelings...that there are things that would be wrong for me to do. And secular Americans love to say they think others should decide what is right and wrong for themselves. Yet when we look at some evil, like say, human trafficking, we say it isn’t simply that it would be wrong for me to do that, but that it is wrong for anyone to do it. It’s a transcendent standard that applies to everyone, everywhere. Well, the only way to have a transcendent standard is to have a transcendent standard giver who has written his law on our hearts, as Romans 2 says.

We insist that people care about justice, we insist that people not trample on the poor, insist that people believe in human rights. But if there is no God, there’s absolutely no basis for talking like that. If there’s no God, we’re just animated pieces of meat. We’re not even here for any purpose. There is not a “right way to live.” We’re here by accident. Anybody who says, “This is unjust and this is just ...” That’s your opinion.

If you say *“I believe that all humans are equal in dignity and worth, therefore all have individual rights that must not be violated.”* I would say that I agree. I agree because we are made in God’s image. But if there is no God then how can you possibly argue that humans are equal in any way really? You could say that it’s self evident...but to most people in the world it actually isn’t self evident. This idea didn’t come from nature. In nature the strong dominate the weak as a rule. And we don’t consider it a violation. Only when people do it is a violation.

If there is no God, then you cannot say that the Holocaust was evil. You can say that you personally find it evil, but you cannot say that the Nazi’s were wrong. The only way to say it was wrong, no matter what the Nazis thought about it, is to appeal to some standard outside of nature, a super nature standard. And the only way to have a super nature standard is to have a super nature standard giver...which is another term for God.

It is fairly common to hear people say some version of *“no one should impose their moral views on others, because everyone has the right to find truth inside him or herself.”* But, aren’t there people in the world who are doing things you believe are wrong, things they should stop doing no matter what they personally believe about the correctness of their behavior? We all do, which means we all believe in an objective moral standard that everyone should abide by, no matter their personal convictions. So the question is, why are people unable to be consistent moral relativists even when they claim to be?

What we’re all doing is living as if there is a God because we know there’s a God, but we won’t admit it. In order for there to be any widely accepted view of morality, there has to be something outside of us that sets it.

C.S. Lewis had a slightly different twist on it. He was an atheist. He was an atheist not just because he thought Christianity was silly, but because he thought the world was cruel. Life was cruel. It has tragedy & death. He lost his mother at an early age, and he said, “The world was very cruel. Life was very cruel. Things aren’t supposed to be this way. I can’t believe in a God who would allow the world to be so cruel.”

Then at one point he says something like, *“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust, but how had I gotten this idea of just and unjust? What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own, but if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too, for the whole argument depended on saying the world really was unjust, not simply that I didn’t like it. Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple.”*

He realized he believed in a supernatural. He believed in God as a basis for disbelieving in God. The only reason he said, "I can't believe in a God who would allow this kind of life" is that he believed in a God who was good. It was just being suppressed.

We'll end with another inward one:

IV. Existential - an argument from desire

- 1) There is a spiritual desire within us.
- 2) If a spiritual desire exists, there must be something to fulfill it.

I'll admit that this one by far the most subjective of the 4 I'm bringing up today. The argument is simply this...inside each of us is longing for something eternal and infinite. There are things that seem to be implanted in our hearts that tell us that we are more than just accidental biology and that we were created for something infinite.

CS Lewis comes in handy again here in his book *Mere Christianity*:

"A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

Hunger doesn't mean a particular meal exists and will be brought to you. But the innate appetite we call hunger corresponds to the existence of food. Innate desires correspond to real objects that can satisfy them. Sexual desire, sex exists. We experience tiredness and sleep exists. Relational desires, friendship exists. So if we find in ourselves a longing for something eternal, infinite...is that not potential evidence of the existence of something infinite that corresponds? We have a longing for joy, love, beauty that no amount of quality of food, sex, friendship, or success can satisfy. We want something that nothing in this world seems able to fulfill. Something that all these wonderful things we enjoy can only hint at.

This one starts to pull together all that we've talked about today. This explains what you feel when you look deep into the solar system or when you look deep into the eyes of someone you love. It explains what you feel when you marvel over the intricacy of the things on Earth that are particularly amazing to you, and what you sense when you hear transcendent music. It explains what you feel when a loved one dies, and why you revolt against injustice in your life and in the world.

If there is no God, then love is meaningless. Beauty is just chemicals in your brain. Right and wrong are just preferences and calls for justice are just opinions. It doesn't actually matter how we treat each other because one day the sun will explode and no one will ever know any of this even happened. But are those conclusions true? Can you actually say love doesn't matter, beauty is simply chemicals...the worst atrocities in history aren't actually evil, it's just that you didn't like them?

If we are actually the product of accidental natural forces, then what we call beauty is nothing but a neurological hardwired response to particular data. But we don't live this way. We can't live this way. We know that beauty and love mean something. In their presence we can no more deny that they mean something than we can deny the nose on our face. NO matter our beliefs about the randomness and meaninglessness of life, standing in front of beauty and love, we know better. We know there is right and wrong.

Deep inside you know intuitively that there is a Creator that made all of this, and that you are not just a bag of animated cells with no purpose, and that there is what Lewis calls "deep magic" at work underneath all that exists.

If God exists, then the Big Bang is not mysterious, nor is the fine tuning of the universe. In fact, they are what we would expect to find. If God exists, then our intuitions about the meaningfulness of love and beauty are to be expected. We long for something eternal and infinite because that is what we were created for.

Paul explains our problem in one phrase...Romans 1
25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie

We all have made a horrible trade. The truth about God for a lie. Reality for unreality.

We suppress this knowledge because we think it's too costly. We think we lose too much control. It's unsettling to acknowledge your utter dependency, your smallness. Reality is hard to live in sometimes. We have doubts whether God is powerful enough or loving enough to trust.

The solution is to realize that this God is not just divine power, eternally omnipotent. He's also the lover of your soul. He's the eternal God who not only put Jupiter in just the right place so you won't die, but also wrapped himself in humanity to pursue you and me who were consciously or unconsciously denying what we know is true about him. He's the God not just of wrath, but the god who diverts that wrath away and into his own Son. He is omnipotent power and eternal, unfailing love.

Through Jesus. God invites us to trade back. He invites us to trade our sin for His grace, our unreality for Reality. He shows up on our doorstep and invites us to un-suppress the truth we have been suppressing. You gain far more than you lose by coming to him. By surrendering to him. By bowing to him. By giving control to him and trusting him. You do lose control, but you get God. And both of those are the best thing possible for you.

Pray. Communion.