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HOW CAN I KNOW THERE IS A GOD?

Is it possible to prove the existence of God? Or is it ultimately a matter of personal faith? And if I do believe in Him, what evidence can I give someone who says he does not believe? In this booklet, our staff takes a look at how the Bible approaches the issue of God's existence. Our prayer is that you will find it helpful as you think about this basic and crucial question.

Martin R. De Haan II

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

What does a clear night sky say to you? Anything?

Nothing? What does it say to the gifted 19-year-old athlete lying in a pool of blood—stabbed because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time?

What about the troubled, disillusioned wife trying to walk off her anger and sense of rejection under a silent early morning sky?

What about the 45-year-old factory worker who has just been laid off for the third time in as many years? What about the astronomer torn between rigid empiricism and a heart that tells him to believe in what he can't see?

Is God there behind the curtain of space, behind the atom, behind the petals and fragrance of a tropical

flower? Is God there, in spite of the advances of science and the failures of politics? Is He there and can He be seen through the tears of those who are abused, exploited, unloved, and empty?

These are basic human questions, and they can come in as many forms as the kind of people this earth supports. They ask:

- *If God does exist, why doesn't He show us in some tangible way that He is there?*
- *In an age of scientific sophistication and exploration, how can we believe in something we can't see?*
- *When I look at all the suffering that people all over the world endure, how can I believe that a God would stand by while people grovel under living conditions that are not fit for dogs?*

- *Why would a good God let my friend—someone who loved people and life—die at such a young age?*
- *If God is in control, why do we have so many natural catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes?*
- *I have never felt God's presence. Everything I have accomplished I have done by my own strength. I don't need a crutch called God.*

“Honest doubters need solid, believable evidence if they are to consider seriously the probability of God's existence.”

Such comments and questions reflect some of the tension that exists

between the beauty of the star-filled sky above and the earth below that is too often a prison of horrors.

It is understandable that doubts would arise about an invisible God who refuses to appear on the evening news to answer His critics and resolve the question of His existence.

For these reasons and others, honest doubters need solid, believable evidence if they are to consider seriously the probability of God's existence. They need to see that those who believe in God do so as a result of sound reason and good judgment. They need to have a clear grasp of the biblical approach to God. They need to see that the existence of God is *not* too good to be true.

THE BIBLICAL APPROACH

When the writer of the first book of the Bible recorded the words, “In the beginning God . . . ,” he was not asking his readers to presuppose the existence of God. They knew from experience who he was talking about. Like the author himself, the people of Israel had seen evidences of a miracle-working Being who had intervened in their lives. Moses’ words about God would have reminded the people that Someone had provided manna for them during their wilderness wanderings. And the mention of God would have made them think of the water that came from a rock when they were thirsty, of a pillar of fire that led them when they needed guidance, and of the path through the Red Sea when

they were trapped by the Egyptians. Yes, Moses wrote the creation story for an audience who had already seen the Creator in action.

But what about those of us who have not had that kind of close encounter? According to the Bible, God has also left us with an overwhelming amount of evidence for His existence. Both Old and New Testaments describe a number of converging lines of evidence that point clearly to the existence of an invisible God who, because of His eternal nature, is still with us.

These lines of evidence include what theologians have classified as *general revelation* and *special revelation*. In that light, let’s define our terms. When we speak of revelation, we’re talking about God who, by His Spirit, unveils or discloses Himself to us.

According to the Bible, God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to us—to make His existence known. *General revelation* refers to the general or universal evidence of the existence of God through (1) creation and (2) man’s conscience. *Special revelation* refers to the special or supernatural evidence of the existence of God through (3) special acts of communication and ultimately in (4) the person of Christ—the God-man.

As we will see in the next section, the biblical approach of general and special revelation gives us enough positive evidence of God’s existence to enable us to place our faith in its validity. As we do that, we begin to see that apart from a knowledge of God’s existence and presence we would have no reasonable explanation for life as we know it. The revelation of God to us through His

Spirit gives us a rationale for many of life’s mysteries. It solves the questions of the existence of matter in the universe, of the presence of life on this planet, of the distinctive nature of mankind as opposed to animals, and of the joy we gain from our self-awareness.

***“I believe in God
for the same
reason I believe
in the rising of
the sun. Not only
do I see it in the
world around me,
but by it I see
all things.”***

So let’s look now at the Bible’s four-pronged approach to letting us know for certain that there is a God.

FOUR REVELATIONS OF GOD

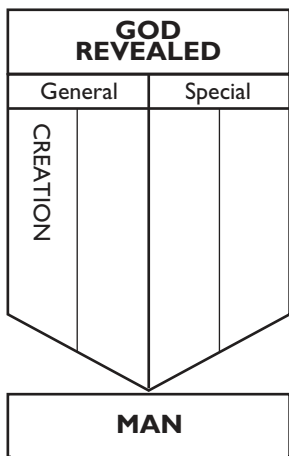
The Bible does not ask us to accept the existence of God blindly. Instead, it shows us how God, by His Spirit, has revealed Himself to us—both in the past and in the present.

As we examine the four biblical lines of evidence, test them with your knowledge of nature, of the human heart, of the Bible, and of Jesus Christ. See if you can agree that the biblical record is complete in its revelation of God to you.

GOD REVEALED THROUGH CREATION

No one can deny that our complex universe is an astounding, majestic marvel. The mere contemplation of its vastness and grandeur

causes our heads to spin. Yet how did it get here? Can it be, as so many scientists contend, that this all happened because of an enormous explosion? Or did it come about as the result of the careful design of an infinite God?



Let's look briefly at two Bible passages that speak of God's revelation of Himself through nature. First, let's turn to the Old Testament book of Job. As you may recall, Job was severely

tested by the devil. Like people today, he had great difficulty finding an acceptable answer to the question: How could a good God allow injustices such as pain and suffering? Here was a man who had been identified as one who truly loved God, yet his riches and his children had been taken away, and he was afflicted with boils.

After a long period of seeking answers to his questions about God, Job finally heard directly from Him. Speaking to him out of a whirlwind, God told Job that to see Him he should look beyond his immediate difficulties and observe nature and the world around him (Job 38). Let's look at some of the specifics of nature in this passage and see what conclusion they lead us to make.

- The wonder of the world's formation (vv.4-6).

- The wonder of the heavens (v.7).
- The wonder of the ocean-land balance (v.8).
- The wonder of a new dawn (v.12).
- The wonder of the ocean depths (v.16).
- The wonder of the life-death cycle (v.17).
- The wonder of the origin of light (v.19).
- The wonder of an electrical storm (v.24).
- The wonder of the wind (v.24).
- The wonder of the hydrologic cycle (vv.25-30).
- The wonder of animals nurturing their young (vv.39-41).

In essence, God was saying, "In your anguish, you are asking where I am while you suffer. Look again at the world around you, and you will see Me there and be reminded of My wisdom and power." Bruce Demarest, author of *General*

Revelation, wrote, “Through the medium of a magnificent creation, Job perceived the reality of God. Awestruck, abased, and filled with reverence at the contemplation of God in His works, Job opened his mouth and said, ‘I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes’ ” (Job 42:5-6).

“If a watch proves the existence of a watchmaker but the universe does not prove the existence of a great Architect, then I consent to be called a fool.”
—Voltaire

Many of the Psalms also testify that nature gives us evidence of the existence of

God. Psalm 19:1-4, for example, says that the eloquent voice of God can be heard throughout all creation. The psalmist wrote:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun.

Day and night, the psalmist said, the glory of God is made known through “the heavens” and “the firmament.” And their message is available to all who will hear, for their voice goes out to all the earth and will be heard “to the end of the world.”

To provide a case in point to support the psalmist's contention, we could go in many different directions. We could address the logical improbability that life began without an outside stimulus, no matter how much time scientists postulate for such an occurrence. We could speak of the intricate pattern of the movement of the bodies in the universe—including amazing pinpoint timing of their courses in relation to one another. We could talk about the precise tilt of the earth, its exact distance from the sun, and its accurate journey through our solar system—all prerequisites for the temperate climate we enjoy.

For the sake of brevity, let's examine only one tiny, vital part of our existence—the eye. Let's see how its complexity implies the involvement of an intelligent designer and

defies the idea of random development.

“The statements of people who do not believe do not outweigh the circumstantial evidence that suggests the universe was the intelligent design of a creator.”
—Russell DeLong

According to most people who don't believe in God, we have achieved our present physical condition on the basis of evolution. They tell us that what started as a single-celled something-or-other a few hundred million years ago has finally worked its way to humanhood. But let's consider this small organ of the body and see if it could

have logically taken that evolutionary route. If it didn't, then could we reasonably deduce that it came from the hands of a Grand Designer?

Here's the case. If you were to take away any part of the eye—the retina, for example—the eye does not work. Or subtract just the lens. No sight. The cornea? Blindness. For the eye to function, all parts must be present and functional. That in itself is a strong argument for design.

But let's go in another direction. Let's take that concept back into the evolutionary chain. Somewhere along the way, a creature making its way to humanity would have had to begin having an eye. But how did it start? The eye couldn't have evolved, because there was nothing that would have caused a creature to begin forming a sightless eye. Since the

evolutionary theory says changes come about because of adaptation, what would have caused an eyeless thing to will a useless eye into its head? How would it know it would ever need an eye that could see?

“The universe is a source of theology. The Scriptures assert that God has revealed Himself in nature.”
—A. H. Strong

An eye can either see or it can't. And there is no reason for a creature to develop a partial eye just so it could become a seeing eye later. So where did the eye begin? Randomly or by design? The mind-staggering intricacy of the eye and the interrelatedness of all necessary parts attests to a

Designer and Creator who knew what He was doing. (This illustration was taken from the book, *The Truth: God Or Evolution?* by Marshall and Sandra Hall, Baker Book House).

The Bible claims that God is the source of it all. The writer of Hebrews made such an assertion when he said:

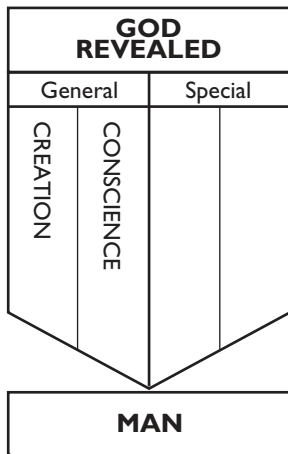
By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (11:3).

That is an amazing statement. It claims that God spoke into existence the worlds of our universe—using nothing we can see for His raw materials.

While that seems hard to believe, it makes great sense when compared with the alternative. If indeed the worlds were not made by God out of nothing, then

the next-best solution is that the worlds were made by no one out of nothing. Compare the two ideas for reasonableness and see which conclusion you come to.

GOD REVEALED THROUGH CONSCIENCE



Why are human rights so important to people all over the world? How can one group such as Amnesty International decide what is

proper treatment of people no matter who they are or where they live? Why do people all over the world have a standard moral code that is amazingly similar? Could this innate knowledge of right and wrong be an inborn witness of the existence of God? If it is, then we should be able to see a universal outgrowth of that God-consciousness.

One human activity that seems to verify this concept of universal knowledge of God is mankind's preoccupation with religion. In every culture and in every locale, people worship. Although they often do not know what they are worshiping, there is a good reason why they at least make the attempt. Within every person is the feeling that there is some kind of higher being over him. Dr. Robert Rattray, a specialist in African traditional religions,

noticed the highly specialized nature of the knowledge of God that comes to people through inner revelation apart from Scripture. Speaking of the Ashanti people, who live in what is now Ghana, Africa, he said:

I am convinced that the conception, in the Ashanti mind, of the Supreme Being has nothing whatever to do with missionary influence, contact with Christians, or even, I believe, with Mohammedans In a sense, therefore, it is true that the Supreme Being, the conception of whom has been innate in the minds of the Ashanti, is the Jehovah of the Israelites. We have seen that mankind possesses an inner testimony to God's existence and to His moral nature.

In Acts 17 we see a biblical example of man's propensity to worship—something that testifies of God's existence while revealing mankind's tendency to misread what knowledge he has. When Paul arrived in Athens, he noticed that the city was full of idols. Picking up the narrative in verse 22, we read:

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (vv.22-23).

Paul then took the opportunity to introduce

these idol-worshippers to the one true God. The interesting thing to notice here is that the Athenians had such an innate knowledge of God that along with all their pagan idols they also worshiped an "unknown" god just to make sure no god was missed. They didn't have to be convinced of the existence of God; they just had to be directed to the true God.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul addressed this question of a basic inborn knowledge in the hearts of all people. As he talked of the Gentiles, he said they had "the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (2:15). Paul implied that all people understand to some degree what is right and wrong because God has given them this knowledge. Even people who have never been schooled in the

regulations of the Old Testament, specifically the Ten Commandments, have an innate knowledge of these basic ideas. This, according to Paul, is a God-given knowledge. The universal presence of an awareness of proper behavior, then, is an evidence of God's existence.

Romans 1:18-32 gives strong evidence that every person possesses an innate knowledge of God. For example, consider the following verses:

- “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v.18).
- “What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them” (v.19).
- “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God” (v.21).

- They “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (v.25).
- “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (v.28).
- Although they knew “the righteous judgment of God,” they continued to do evil (v.32).

Everyone has an inner knowledge of God. Paul said that “what may be known of God is manifest in them.” However, even though all humans have an inborn witness that God exists, some will not admit it—they “suppress the truth.”

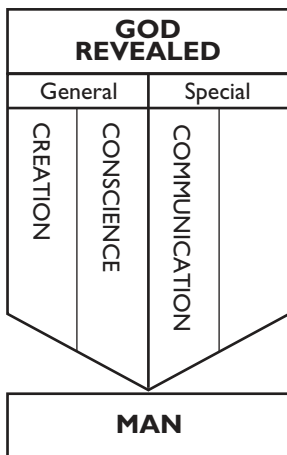
As we conclude this section, think for a moment about the reaction of people the world over when they read about gross acts of terrorism or human-rights violations. Those deeds are repugnant to all people,

regardless of their creed or background. But why? Is it a result of learned social behavior as we have climbed the evolutionary ladder? If so, then this morality that we all possess is merely an advanced animal trait. And so too are other distinct characteristics such as intellect, compassion, and even scientific reasoning. Yet where are these beginning traits in the primates? Why does only one being—the human—possess these things, even though evolutionary theory would say that there are some animals that have been around much longer? And what would have caused that first primate to begin developing morals, compassion, and the other distinctly human characteristics?

Wouldn't it seem much more reasonable to believe that a moral species is the

way it is because it has a moral Creator—Someone who implanted those shared characteristics in all people?

GOD REVEALED THROUGH COMMUNICATION



Although God has revealed His existence through the natural world of creation and through an imprint on our innermost being, that's not enough. We would never know all we need to

know about Him if He hadn't chosen to tell us specifically about Himself through other means. We can see the results of a partial revelation by observing the rituals and idolatry of primitive tribes. These people have sensed through nature and through conscience that there is a being higher than they, but they lack the knowledge of who that person really is. Therefore, they try to worship God without knowing Him. Their rituals of sacrifice indicate their awareness of a being whom they feel they must somehow appease. Their interest in evil spirits demonstrate their inborn knowledge of good and evil. What these people need to see is that simply knowing Deity exists cannot satisfy the human heart. People need to know God personally.

That's why it is essential

that we look at a third way God chose to let us know of His existence. Throughout the thousands of years it took for the events of the Old Testament and New Testament to unfold and for the men inspired by God to record those events, God communicated with mankind in special ways.

“We would never know all we need to know about God if He hadn't chosen to tell us specifically about Himself through other means.”

It is through this special revelation that we find out what God is like and what He expects from us.

The Bible makes it clear that the trail of evidence for special revelation goes all the way back to the

beginning. For instance, God spoke directly to Adam in the Garden of Eden. He met with Adam every evening to converse with him. God told him about the one tree that was forbidden to him. Then, when Adam and Eve disobeyed the command, He audibly pronounced His judgments on them.

God continued to communicate with various men after Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden. Cain heard His voice. And so did Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was obvious to these ancient men that God existed. They had heard from Him in a way that made His existence undeniable.

God's special revelation to mankind also took on another form. In addition to speaking audibly and directly to those mentioned above and to others, He

communicated in a more indirect, yet equally valuable way. Through the inspiration of His Spirit, He caused certain men to write down a series of documents we now call the Bible.

For demonstration of the Bible's claims that God spoke directly through its human authors, we can turn to some verses in the New Testament. In 2 Peter 1:21 the apostle said:

Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Here is the claim that the Old Testament writers who spoke of things such as God's judgment, future events, the coming of Messiah, and God's dealings with Israel were not speaking for themselves. They were spokesmen for the Creator-God.

Another verse that speaks of special revelation

is 2 Timothy 3:16, where Paul said:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Again the claim is made that God specifically revealed Himself through the words of Scripture.

These verses in 2 Timothy indicate that by reading and obeying God's Word, a person can become so familiar with the mind of God that he can be the kind of person God wants His people to be.

But can we see any evidence—other than what the Bible says about itself—that this book is different from all other religious books? Is it significant enough to be trusted as a

special communication from God? A look at the uniqueness of the Bible suggests that it is not a selection of random scribblings by common people. Instead, it is a carefully orchestrated collection of documents that have been accurately and amazingly preserved for thousands of years. It has the marks of something that was miraculously conceived and safeguarded.

It is unique among literature for many reasons:

- A single story is woven throughout the books, although the men who wrote them had no way of collaborating.
- The Old Testament books predict, and the New Testament books proclaim, the coming of a Messiah-King.
- When the Bible speaks of scientific matters (even those about which the authors could have

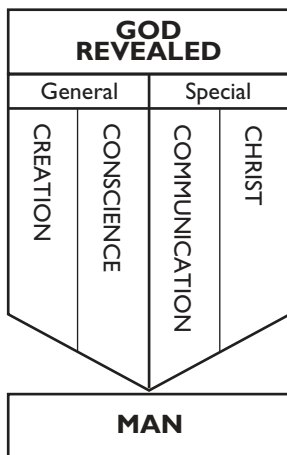
no empirical evidence) it is accurate (Job 26:7-12, Isa. 40:22, 1 Cor. 15:39).

- The historical facts and names contained in the Bible are being continually verified by historical studies and archaeological findings.
- The documents from which the Bible was translated were preserved in miraculous ways, giving us an accurate record of what the biblical writers recorded.
- The writings claim to be of divine origin (Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:1-3; Zeph. 1:1). It is not presumptuous,

then, to conclude that through special means of communication, God has revealed to us more than just His existence. He let us know about His nature, His will, and His love for mankind. That's why the Bible is so important. It tells us how we can find peace

with the Creator-God and how we can live in a way that pleases Him.

GOD REVEALED THROUGH CHRIST



Even if we knew about God through nature, realized that He exists because we have inner knowledge of Him, and read about Him in the Bible, those factors alone would not give us a complete revelation of God. To know God as completely as possible, we need to be

able to see Him as He interacts with mankind. We need to see that He can fulfill the predictions of the Old Testament prophets. This can happen only when we see God as He is revealed in Christ.

Although we often think of it this way, the revelation of God through Christ did not have its beginning in a Bethlehem manger. In the Bible, Jesus is identified as the Creator of all things (Jn. 1:1-3). Therefore, He is more than an important Jewish baby lying in a Judean stable. He is the One who originated all the evidences for God that can be found in creation, conscience, and communication.

Also, as Jesus lived His 33-year earthly life, He revealed the personality and character of God to man. Jesus said that to look at Him was to see the Father (Jn. 14:9). In

addition, the apostle John declared, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (Jn. 1:18).

One passage indicating that God specifically revealed Himself to mankind through Christ is found at the beginning of Hebrews:

God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

The fourth way that God has revealed Himself to mankind is through the coming of Christ to earth. Jesus is the flesh-and-blood proof that there is a God. In fact, Jesus' coming into the world as a member of humanity was the ultimate revelation of God because Jesus Christ is God.

In Romans 9:5, Paul said, “Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.” John, writing in his first letter, made this claim: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:20). And in Hebrews 1:8, the Father says to the Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”

Yes, the One who walked the dusty roads of Galilee healing the sick, raising the dead, and teaching kingdom truth was God incarnate. When He spoke, it was God speaking. When He acted, it was God in action. The Bible identifies itself as the written Word, and Christ is called the living Word of God (Jn. 1:1-14). Consider

what it means that Christ is the ultimate revelation of God. If you want to know God’s response to those in deep physical need, look to Jesus as He responded to the multitudes with compassion. If you want to know God’s attitude about legalism and self-righteousness, look to Christ’s relationship to the Pharisees. If you want to know God’s feelings toward the penitent, look to God’s Son as He forgave the truly changed of heart. If you want to know God’s relationship to those who believe in Him, look to Jesus in His tender leading of His disciples.

Therefore, if you want to know God, look to Jesus Christ. It is only through Jesus’ coming in the flesh that a way was opened for those of us living on this side of the Old Testament to become acquainted with God.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Each of us has a choice. We can look at the evidence for God's existence and believe that He is there, or we can set aside the evidence and decide that there is no God. Either way, we must cross a bridge of faith, because neither argument can present laboratory verification. The key question is this: In a matter that is so basic to our well-being and in a question that demands an answer, which position can we most honestly choose? Let's look at the options that can guide us as we cross the bridge.

OPTION ONE: GOD DOES EXIST

- The natural world reflects a designer and maker as much as a wristwatch or a dictionary.
- Human conscience exists as an inner voice that

allows the person who believes in God to follow his best judgment and highest instincts.

- The Old and New Testament Scriptures claim to speak in behalf of God in a manner that is consistent with the evidence of God in both creation and conscience.
- Christ is the ultimate evidence of God in that He is claimed to be the Creator (Jn. 1:3), the source of our conscience (v.9), and the focus of Scripture (5:39).

OPTION TWO: GOD DOES NOT EXIST

- Our complex and orderly world came about with no personal impetus, cause, or source. Everything just happened.
- The laws that govern our universe have developed without guidance or direction.

- Great and almost magical leaps were taken along the evolutionary way, allowing nonplants to cross the chasm to become plants, and nonanimals to become animals. Without guidance, these beings developed brains where nonbrains had been and sensory organs where nothing like them had been.
 - Randomness accounts for the delicate, unique composition of our planet that makes possible our existence on this oasis of life in the desert of a hostile universe.
 - Man is without a spirit. His existence ends at death, just as it does for dogs and cats.
 - Any morality that man possesses is contrived and societal in origin. Therefore, no one can be expected to make value judgments for others.
 - The Bible is an incredible coincidence—even though it was written by 40 diverse men who lived over a span of 1,600 years, kept separate records, recorded events independently, and told a remarkably singular story.
 - There is no master plan for mankind. Our existence is an accident, our work on earth is fruitless, and our relationships with one another are ultimately meaningless. Like a pack of wild animals, we have no other purpose on earth but survival.
 - Christ wasn't telling the truth when He said He came from heaven to rescue us from eternal death and bring us to God.
- Upon which option are you willing to stake your eternal destiny? Which bridge will you cross?

WHY SOME DON'T BELIEVE

The Bible stops short of diplomacy when it comes to the issue of why some don't believe in the existence of God. Psalm 14:1 doesn't hold anything back when it says, "The fool has said in his heart. 'There is no God.'"

That is not as insulting as it may seem. This verse isn't referring to the intellectual limitation of those who don't believe. The Hebrew word translated "fool" here refers to one who is evil, wicked, morally deficient. This definition is supported by the context, because verse 1 continues by describing fools in the following way: "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good." In other words, some people deny the existence of God because of their wicked lifestyle.

In Psalm 10:13 the question is asked, "Why do the wicked renounce God?" The answer? "He has said in his heart, 'You will not require an account.'" Because he doesn't want to face judgment for sin, he denies God. The apostle John put it this way:

Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed (Jn. 3:19-20).

The person who is determined to live in a godless manner will be inclined to see a godless universe.

The key word, then, is not *doubt*, it is *denial*. An illustration of this is in John 5, where Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. When the Pharisees heard of this, they were incensed and "sought to kill Him" (v.16). Then

things got worse when Jesus referred to God as “My Father,” which the Pharisees knew was a claim to equality with God. Addressing the angry officials, Jesus gave them several reasons why they should believe that He was God.

But they would not believe. In their refusal to believe, we can see a pattern that is repeated in those who refuse to believe that God exists. Here’s what Jesus said about their unwillingness to believe despite the clear evidence:

- “You *are not willing* to come to Me” (v.40).
- “You *do not receive Me*” (v.43).
- “You *do not believe* ” (v.47).

The essence of unbelief, Jesus was saying, is denial. It is not a matter of knowledge or evidence—the Pharisees had plenty of that. It is a matter of the

will. They saw with their eyes and heard with their ears the marvelous works of Jesus. They knew the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. But they were determined to deny Jesus’ deity.

So it is with many who refuse to believe in God. They consciously and willfully deny that the evidence is convincing. They become rebels against what they know and observe.

Notice the words of the apostle John concerning those who choose not to believe:

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son (1 Jn. 2:22).

Those are strong words, but they describe in clear terms the problem of those who willfully decide that God’s revelation of Himself is not enough to convince them of His existence.

FOUR CLASSICAL ARGUMENTS

Scholars have long searched for an open-and-shut argument for God's existence. Yet arguments alone cannot convince anyone, because there will always be skeptics who demand empirical evidence—evidence that is not available.

Through the centuries though, intelligent attempts have been made to form arguments to prove that God is the Creator and Sustainer of this world. Here are four attempts of thinking people to prove God's existence.

ARGUMENT FROM BEING

Classical name:

Ontological argument

Originated by:

Anselm and Descartes

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Main tenet:

Anyone who would even consider that God exists is, in a sense, admitting that there is a God. Here is the logic of that statement: God, by definition, is the greatest being that can be conceived. If He did not exist, He could not be the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, such a being exists. Stated another way, the fact that we have in us the idea of God demands that God is its cause.

ARGUMENT FROM FIRST CAUSE

Classical name:

Cosmological argument

Originated by:

Plato and Aristotle

Main tenet:

Our world—complex, finite, subject to change, and intelligible—must have had an adequate first cause. Scientists generally agree that our world had a beginning. And that

beginning had to be contingent on a thing that was not contingent on anything else for its existence. Therefore, that noncontingent entity had to be infinite, eternal, everlasting, and self-existing. It had to be God.

ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

Classical name:

Teleological argument

Originated by:

Aquinas and Paley

Main tenet:

The purpose and design of the world point to the existence of God. Physicists marvel at the unbelievable complexity of everything they study. Yet it all fits together in an intricate, workable system. Consider the fragile balance of heat and cold, the delicate mix of oxygen and other gases, the thin curtain that shields us from ultraviolet rays, the

complicated relationship of the parts of the ecological system to one another. They point to intelligent design.

ARGUMENT FROM MAN

Classical name:

Anthropological argument

Originated by:

Various thinkers

Main tenet:

This reasoning is based on the nature of the human personality. When we worship, we are able to think abstractly and to project ourselves mentally into the world beyond. We are able to make tough moral decisions that lead to heroic self-sacrificing deeds that could not come from instinct. We admire art, music, and architecture. These unusual qualities of man must be the product of an intelligent, moral, personal Creator.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT—SIX VIEWS

Throughout the years, mankind has struggled to put together his beliefs about God. Here are six of the major viewpoints that he has come up with:

VIEW ONE: AGNOSTICISM

Basic Tenet: It's not possible to know whether God exists. We cannot know how the world began.

Advocates: Thomas Huxley and William Spencer.

They say: "I don't know if there's a God or not."

VIEW TWO: ATHEISM

Basic Tenet: There is no need for a God. The gods of the Greeks and the

God of the Bible are the same.

Advocates: Madalyn Murray O'Hair and Bertrand Russell.

They say: "I know there is no God."

VIEW THREE: DEISM

Basic Tenet: God set the universe in motion and left it to its own results. God no longer interacts with man.

Advocates: Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

They say: "The world is like a clock that God wound up once and it is now winding down."

VIEW FOUR: PANTHEISM

Basic Tenet: We are all part of God. Everything that exists has God in it.

Advocates: Spinoza and Goethe.

They say: A pantheist would look at a tree and say, “That tree is God.”

VIEW FIVE: PANENTHEISM

Basic Tenet: God permeates the universe. All things exist in Him.

Advocates: Paul Tillich and people in the New Age Movement.

They say: A panentheist would look at a tree and say, “God is in that tree.”

VIEW SIX: THEISM

Basic Tenet: There is one God. He created the universe, and we can know Him.

Advocates: Christians and Jews.

They say: “God is there and He is not silent” (Francis Schaeffer).

“NOW I BELIEVE IN GOD”

Craig James Woods is a respected TV meteorologist whose professionalism and accurate weather forecasts have earned him great respect. Here he tells of his journey from atheism to faith.

I used to be an atheist. I had decided that there was no God. It seemed to me that the only universal force at work in the world was gravity—nothing more personal or caring than that.

I had always been told that mankind was created in the image of God. But from what I had observed about people and the way they treated one another, this was certainly not an image I liked. Besides, the widespread suffering endured by mankind—caused by floods,

earthquakes, disease, fire, and other catastrophes—caused me to conclude that if there was a God, He certainly didn't care for people any more than I did.

“The widespread suffering endured by mankind—caused by floods, earthquakes, disease, fire, and other catastrophes—caused me to conclude that if there was a God, He certainly didn't care for people any more than I did.”

It seemed far more reasonable to believe in no God than in One who is cruel and capricious.

Bringing my beliefs with me, and all my arguments to support them, I arrived in Grand Rapids in 1972. I was ready to work hard to achieve all the goals I had set for myself. I wanted a good-looking family, a nice home, a great job, and a decent income. By the age of 25, I had just about reached all those goals. But to my deep disappointment, I was not being fulfilled. In fact, I began to have strong feelings of dissatisfaction and restlessness. I became bored with life.

It was about then that I began to meet (or notice for the first time) people who were different. They had an inner peace about them that I did not have and could not will to have. This made me very angry. And when these people told me that their peace came from a living God within them, I became even more angry.

I had always been able

to dismiss talk about a living God as foolishness. But the reality of something different in these people's

“I had always been able to dismiss talk about a living God as foolishness. But the reality of something different in these people's lives was too strong to deny.”

lives was too strong to deny. Then I noticed a change in my wife Marcie that was even more impossible to deny. Much of her bitterness, anxiety, and resentment had been replaced overnight by that same spirit of peace and assurance my friends had displayed.

Three weeks later, Marcie got up the courage

to tell me that she had committed her life to Jesus Christ. I could fight Him no longer. I too turned my life over to this living God who was making Himself known to me through my changed wife and my friends.

Now I know there is a God. He has revealed Himself in the Bible, which I had never believed. He has revealed Himself in the design of the natural world, which I now see from a different perspective. And He has revealed Himself in the lives of people, which was the key that opened my heart.

He is ready and willing to reveal Himself to you too, if you will ask Him to make Himself known.

HOW CAN I KNOW THE GOD WHO IS THERE?

Whether or not God exists is an important question. But actually knowing this God is even more important. J. I. Packer wrote, "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we have in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? To know God. What is the best thing in life? To know God. What in man gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself."

But who can provide the introduction? Look at what Jesus said to His disciples:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go

and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also' " (Jn. 14:1-7).

We invite you to acknowledge your sin and need of a Savior. Realize that Christ died for you. And believe John, who wrote, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (Jn. 1:12).



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