

Does God Exist?

Introduction

Well, for those of you who were here last week, you will remember that we learned about theology – what it is (i.e., the study of God) and the importance of studying it (i.e., glorifies God). We also learned about the doctrine of the Word and the authority that Scripture contains over things such as church tradition and even our own subjective reasoning. During that time we thought about important characteristics of Scripture and the claims that it made for itself.

Well, as we studied last week the attributes of the Word of God, it would be fitting to consider the attributes of the God of the Word this morning.

There are two questions that lie at the foundation of not only of man’s religious knowledge, but also of every possible form of knowledge:

- 1) Is there a God? (Does God exist, and if so, how can we know that?)
- 2) What is God like? (What are his attributes?)

These are the questions that we will seek to answer during our time together today.

Views on God’s Existence

This brings us to the major question of this lesson: Does God exist? Let’s take a quick survey of the seven major ways this question has been answered by philosophers, theologians, and common people.

- _____Atheism_____ - There is no God.
- _____Pantheism_____ - God is everything; everything is God.
- _____Polytheism_____ - There are many gods.
- _____Gnosticism_____ - There are two equal gods; one is good and the other is evil.
- _____Deism_____ - God created the universe and then left it to run by itself. God doesn’t interfere in the world.
- _____Theism_____ - One true God exists. He is a personal being who rules over the universe.

A Biblical, Presuppositional Argument for God’s Existence

We begin this evening by thinking about the existence of God. In response to our first question, “Is there a God?” we should first begin by noting that the Bible doesn’t spend time arguing that God exists, but simply presumes that He does. So we too can adopt a presuppositionalist approach and simply state that we propose to assume the fact of God’s existence as granted.

Last week, we said that our course will maintain two assumptions or presuppositions: (1) that the Bible is true and that it is, in fact, our only absolute standard of truth; and (2) that the God who is spoken of in the

Bible exists, and that He is who the Bible says He is: the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. Let's consider further why we should start our theological pilgrimage presuming the existence of God.

To get us started, if someone were to ask you why you think God exists, what would you say?

If we are Christians, we can say that we believe God is “really there,” because He has revealed Himself to all men *generally* by creation and providence, *propositionally* in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, *personally* in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and *savingly* through the work of His Word and Spirit.

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul tells us that God has made the fact of his existence plain to all humanity (v. 19). In verse twenty, he says that “**since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.**” God has revealed himself generally to all men through creation, and all men are held accountable for this revelation.

The beauty and complexity of creation is enough for man to know that God exists. Who is it that sends the rain or sun, brings the night and the day, or separates the land from the sea? From the order of the seasons to the intricacies of a flower to the variety of creatures, we see God’s hand as the intelligent Creator. Indeed, even man bears testimony to God’s existence by being made in His image.

Well, despite this revelation in creation, Paul goes on to say in Romans that man willfully suppresses the truth and exchanges the truth of God for a lie. Yet, some awareness of God exists in every human mind by natural instinct, even idol worship adds proof to this, or our innate desire for something more, which can be only satisfied in following God.

Although fallen humanity sinfully rejects the truth of the God of the Bible, the Holy Spirit regenerates and reveals Christ to the heart. It’s then that new believers start to apprehend the grace of God and begin to understand the overwhelming evidence, which the Christian faith entails. Blessing often comes to “**those who have not seen and yet have believed**” (John 20:29).

Traditional Arguments for God’s Existence

While we need no other reasons than these to convince us that God exists, the traditional arguments that Christians (and some non-Christians) have formulated for the existence of God can be very helpful in removing barriers to a belief in God. The traditional “theistic proofs” for the existence of God are attempts to demonstrate that it’s irrational to reject the idea of God’s existence. These arguments help to establish plausibility that there is a God. It is important for us to be familiar with the best arguments.

Note: We are going to look at 5 naturalistic theistic arguments. Naturalistic theism is restricted to creation and reason. So naturalistic theism seeks to present such arguments and to reach conclusions within the sphere of reason. Naturalistic theism can be compared with biblical theism, which sets forth truth and reaches conclusions based on the Scripture. So there is a book of nature that discloses that God exists and a book of revelation that also attest to His being, both of which are in harmony because both come from the same source. Now naturalistic theism is not comparable to Scripture in that it can only demonstrate the existence of God, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. There is no proof from nature or from reason that can establish the

fact that God is love or that God is gracious. All of relates to that belongs to God's special revelation.

A. Cosmological Argument – the universe is an effect which demands an adequate cause.

Presuppositional Note: Arguing from effect back to cause. This argument depends upon 3 presuppositions: (1) every effect has a cause, (2) the effect is dependent on its cause for its existence, and (3) that nature cannot produce itself. – To say that anything has caused itself to exist is to say that it acted before it existed, which is absurd. It **was** and **was not**, it was **something and was nothing at the same time**. **And it was diverse from itself, for a cause** must be a distinct thing from that which is caused by it.

Developmental Note: If something now exists (the universe) then either it came from nothing or it came from something which must be eternal. The something eternal can be the universe itself, or chance as an eternal principle, or God the eternal Being.

Norman Geisler's cosmological argument:

- 1) Some limited, changing beings exist. To deny this requires an affirmation from an existing being – so it is self-defeating.
- 2) The present existence of every limited, changing being is caused by another.
- 3) There cannot be an infinite regress of causes of beings.
- 4) Therefore, there is a first Cause of the present existence of these beings.
- 5) The first Cause must be infinite, eternal, unchangeable one.

Thomas Aquinas:

- 1) From Motion
observation – motion cannot initiate itself but must be motivated by something already in motion.
Implication – an infinite chain of movers is impossible, for then there would be no first mover and therefore no motion at all. The chain must have a beginning.
Conclusion - the unmoved Prime Mover is what we call God.
- 2) From Causality
observation – certain events are caused by prior events, which are themselves caused, etc.
implication – as above the causal chain cannot be infinite.
Conclusion – the uncaused First Cause is what we call God, because the first cause is not self-created, but is eternal and therefore self-existent, since He depends on nothing outside Himself, being caused by nothing.
- 3) From Possibility or Contingent Beings
observation – certain things are transitory, their existence derivative.

Implication – the chain of derivative existence cannot be infinite but must find its source in a self-existent necessary being.

Illustration – Suppose a chain hung down out of the heavens from an unknown height, and though every link of it gravitated toward the earth, and what it hung upon was not visible, yet the link of chains did not fall, but kept its position, we ask what supported or kept up the chain. What holds up the whole? The last link, depends upon the one cause above it. But a chain composed of an infinite number of links can no more support itself, than a chain composed of a finite number of links. There is a First Cause that is self-existent and eternal, **independent** and **necessary** (it is of such nature as that it could not or cannot but be – his existence is not owing to a choice at all, but to the necessity of its own nature), originally vital and the source of all life. Independent – for what did never need a productive cause, does as little need a sustaining cause.

Conclusion – this self-existent necessary being is what we call God.

- 4) From Imperfection –
observation – we judge certain things to have a lesser degree of perfection than others.

Implication – relative assessments require an absolute standard of perfection. According to Aristotle, that which is greatest in truth is greatest in Being.

Conclusion – this absolute standard, God, must exist.

- 5) From Design –
observation – inanimate things function together to accomplish an ordered purpose.

Implication – this cannot occur by chance but requires an intelligent Designer.

Conclusion – this designer is what we call God.

Note on the meaning of “Cause”: (1) a cause is something – because something that does not exist cannot produce something. Can nothing produce something? No. (2) A cause must have power – there must be something in its nature to account for its effects. (3) the power must be adequate (sufficient and appropriate) to the effect. (4) “Cause” is not merely antecedence – just something that came before – ie- the succession of seasons – no man says that winter is the cause of summer. Winter did not cause summer because it comes before it.

B. Teleological Argument – the purpose, order, and design we observe in the world calls for a designer.

Teacher’s Note: The Greek word *teleios* means "perfection," "result," or "end." When we look at something that has been finished or perfected, we conclude it's resulting design must have had a designer.

Developmental Note:

- 1) X is too complex, orderly, adaptive, apparently purposeful, or beautiful to have occurred randomly or accidentally.
- 2) Therefore, X must have been created by an intelligent, wise, or purposeful being.
- 3) God is that intelligent, wise, or purposeful being.
- 4) Therefore, God exists

Illustrative Note: Introduce with William Paley's Watchmaker illustration.

Developmental Note:

there is observable order or design in the world that cannot be attributed to the object itself; this observable order argues for an intelligent being who established this order – this being is God. **Plato said, “God geometrizes.”** – a man some time ago doubted the existence of God and he was reading Plato. And he came across the sentence, “God geometrizes.” He threw the book and it landed by a beautiful little flower. He broke it from its silvery stem and began to examine its structure. Its stamens were five in number, its calyx had five parts, its delicate coral base, five. The sentence, “God geometrizes,” came across his mind over again. The text was written so long ago but here was the illustration in a flower. He calculated that there were 125 chances against such an idea that the flower would have 5, 5s in one flower. He extended the calculation to two flowers by squaring the sums – 15,625 chances. Then he looked up to see the forest full of them. He ended with writing, “sing on, sunny birds, sing on, sweet minstrels! Lo!, ye and I have a God.”

Scriptural Note: Psalm 94:9-10 – [9] He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? [10] He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?

Hebrews 3:4 For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

Atheistic Note: If we take the other view, then we have to assume a power which produces the intelligible and rational, without being itself intelligent and rational. It works in all things, and in each with exact reference to all, yet without knowing anything of itself or of the rules it follows or of the order it finds.

Ship Illustration: Not only is their order in the creation but there is also purpose. On combining all of these disassociated elements for an advantageous end think of a ship. Take the hull of a ship, masts, sails, anchors, rudder, compass, chart – they all have no necessary connection. The future use of a ship is not contained in any one of them, but is possible through their combination. That combination has no place in our rational intelligence unless its use previous existed in the human thought. Not only did the creation itself demand a creator, but the order and use demands a designer.

Can anything be done by chance, which has all the marks of design?

C. Ontological Argument – the existence of God is certified by the fact that the human mind believes that He does exist.

Anselm was working within the Platonic framework, in which the ideal is more real than the physical or material.

Developmental Note:

- 1) God is that Being than whom none greater can be conceived.
- 2) Now, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived existed only in the intellect, it would not be the absolute greatest, for we could add to it existence in reality.
- 3) It follows then, that the Being, who nothing greater can be conceived, God, necessarily has real existence.

Argument Against:

- 1) Tooth Fairy – the idea of a tooth fairy does not imply that there is a tooth fairy.
- 2) Lost Island – the idea of a lost island does not imply that there is such in reality.
Not every idea people have corresponds to an actual reality.
- 3) Existence is not an attribute. IF I imagine a dollar and compare it with a real dollar there is no difference in their essence, in what they are. The only difference is whether they are. The point here is that existence is not necessary of the greatest of all conceivable beings. Such a being may exist, or it may not. In either case its essence is the same.

Reply: With imperfect or finite being, actual existence is not the necessary for the conception of the idea, so that objection does not apply to the most perfect Being since actual existence is the essential feature.

Conclusion: It seems well intentioned, but unsatisfactory

D. Anthropological Argument – How can man, a moral, intelligent, and living being, be explained apart from a moral, intelligent, living God?

Developmental Note:

- 1) We all possess a moral impulse
- 2) Following this impulse by behaving morally is not very well rewarded within this life. Being good does not always pay!
- 3) Why should one be moral then? Would it not be wiser to act selfishly at times?
- 4) There must be some basis for ethics and morality, some sort of reward, which in turn involves several factors – immortality and an undying soul,

a coming time of judgment, and a God who establishes and supports values and rewards and punishes evil.

- 5) Therefore, the moral order requires the existence of God.

Lessons For Our Lives

- The Bible _____ God's existence.
- God says that the man who says there is no God is a _____ (Ps. 14:1).
- God has _____ Himself plainly to man, but man has suppressed and rejected that knowledge (Rom. 1:18-20).
- Should effect our evangelism to a growingly biblical illiterate society (Acts 17)
 - 1) Paul establishes a framework in verses 22-34
 - 2) He begins with a compliment of "I see that you are very religious," today, we would say, "I see that you are very spiritual." (vs. 22)
 - 3) He intends to challenge where they are – these men of Athens have too many gods and can't give too much allegiance to any one god without offending others – which is why they even have a idol to the "unknown god" for fear of offending him. **And part of the Christian witness is vs. 23 – "But I got to tell you, "You don't know whom to worship.""** You are not really spiritual unless you worship the Spirit of the living God.
 - 4) Then Paul starts talking about the true God – If Paul would have started with, "You must believe God by trusting in Jesus for you salvation;" there would have been no foundation to accept this truth. And too often, we preach the same thing and talk about all that Christ gives you in the "abundant life," but what does that mean to our biblical illiterate people? More sex? Better job? Bigger home? Nicer car? **When people are biblically illiterate they need to learn the story-line of the Bible or Jesus does not make sense. We need to put it in a framework like Paul. We need to teach – "A God who..."**
 - a) **created everything – vs. 24a**
 - b) **is independent – vs. 24b-25**
 - c) **is sovereign – vs. 26**
 - d) **is personal – vs. 27-28**
 - e) **is jealous – vs. 29**
 - f) **sent His Son – Jesus Christ – vs. 30-32**