

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

## A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

### LESSON #6 – EXISTENCE OF GOD

#### Baptist Faith and Message Article 2

##### God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

#### MEMORY VERSE

Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6, HCSB).

#### THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

How do we know there is a God? Can informed, intelligent people have good reason to believe in God?

QUESTION 1: What is the view of the Bible regarding the existence of God?

ANSWER: Gen 1:1, Exod 20:3; Deut 6:4; Ps 14:1; 19:1-3; Isa 44:6-19; 45:22; Acts 14:15-17; Rom 1:19-20; 1 Tim 1:17

SUMMARIZE:

#### EXPLANATION

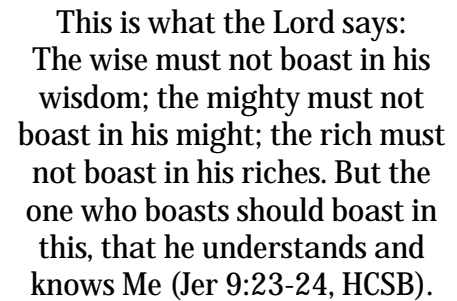
The knowledge of God is humanity's greatest privilege and only lasting source of significance and satisfaction. The knowledge of God is the beginning and end of all knowledge. Belief in the one, true God is the most decisive factor in one's worldview and direction of life.

In the U.S., 90% of the population believes in God. Belief in God or gods, an afterlife, and prayer or other rituals to affect change in the natural realm is virtually universal among human cultures. It seems that humanity is “hard-wired” to believe in God. In fact, there is some scientific research that now confirms this idea of humans being biologically engineered to seek a transcendent meaning.

QUESTION 2: What are the major views of the existence of God?

ANSWER:

1. The belief that there is “an independent being who governs all and on which all else depends” is called “theism.”
2. The belief that denies there is “an independent being who governs all and on which all else depends” is called “atheism.”
3. The belief that we cannot know with reasonable certainty whether there is a God is called “agnosticism.”



**This is what the Lord says:  
The wise must not boast in his  
wisdom; the mighty must not  
boast in his might; the rich must  
not boast in his riches. But the  
one who boasts should boast in  
this, that he understands and  
knows Me (Jer 9:23-24, HCSB).**

QUESTION 3: What are the major arguments for the existence of God?

ANSWER:

1. The argument from causes. When something happens in our daily life we look for a cause. If our refrigerator stops working, we want to find out the cause so we can repair it. Life is full of causes and effects. In the same way, when we look at the universe, it is not reasonable to say, “It just happened.” It is reasonable to look for a cause behind the universe (i.e., God).
2. The argument from design. William Paley’s famous example is that of someone finding a watch while walking in the woods. One would assume quite intelligently that there was a watchmaker. The watch didn’t just happen by chance. The universe is far more complex than a watch. We must conclude that there is a designer who created it.
3. The argument from human nature. We are thinking, feeling, acting persons. We can remember the past and hope in the future. We retain our identity throughout our lives. Even if we lose limbs, we have not lost our identity. It is reasonable to conclude our understanding of ourselves is real and not an illusion. It is further reasonable to deduce that there is a similar person—a God—who created us and not mere blind chance.
4. The argument from morality. Humans in every time and culture share a common set of moral values. We possess an innate sense of right and wrong, justice, freedom, and responsibility. We experience guilt when we do wrong or anger when we are wronged. It is reasonable to believe there is a God who lies behind this morality.
5. The argument from human reason. Reasoning depends upon thinking that is coherent and corresponds to reality. That is what we mean by the term “reasonable.” The

existence of God makes sense to our minds. This may not be “proof” but it is reasonable to believe in God.

6. The argument from the impossibility of the contrary. When we use any of our human faculties (mind, heart, will, conscience), we are giving evidence for God. There is no other reasonable explanation for the existence of rationality, language, judicial sentiment, human dignity, aesthetics, mathematics, etc. without a belief in God who stands behind it all. The atheistic worldview cannot account for these things. It is simply impossible to conceive of a universe without God. This argument, also called the transcendental argument, asks, “What are the necessary preconditions for intelligibility?” In other words, what would we have to presuppose lies behind the universe to account for what we witness? Which worldview best explains reality?

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**“The best and only possible proof for the existence of such a God is that his existence is required for the uniformity of nature and for the coherence of all things in the world... Thus there is absolutely certain proof for the existence of God and the truth of Christian theism.”**

**Cornelius Van Til,  
The Defense of the Faith**

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## THE ROLE OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

Ultimately there are only two possible positions: Independence from God or dependence upon God; autonomous use of reason or biblical reasoning that is under submission to the Lordship of Christ.

Fallen man’s most ultimate epistemological commitment is not to logic and science but to his belief in the lie of Satan—that man can be as God in the sense of being his own ultimate authority and do so successfully.

Since there can be only one truly ultimate authority, the most ultimate authority cannot be both the Word of God and the word of man. In the fall of man, Satan challenged man to put God on trial, elevating himself over the Word of God as its judge. If the Word of God is true, it is only because man has judged it to be true. Man can successfully be as God. Man can be the measure of all things and the master of his own destiny and his

world won't fall apart. That is fallen man's most basic philosophical commitment.

This, then, is the essence of sin; Man’s rebellion against recognizing his dependence upon God in everything and the assumption of his ability to be independent of God.

God is the only source of true knowledge and of life itself. To be separated from God brings darkness of understanding and ultimately death because man, contrary to what he foolishly believes, is utterly dependent upon God (cf. Acts 17:22-31).

The problem is not that natural man in the pagan environment has no witness to God’s truth. The whole world is pulsating with the revelation of God (Psalm 19); there is no escaping it. And man, the creature created in God’s image, also has an inner witness to God’s truth (Rom 2:14-16). The problem is not a lack of revelation but natural man’s interpretation of this revelation.

Knowledge of the true and living God bombards fallen man, but he “suppresses the truth in unrighteousness” and “exchange(s) the truth of God for the lie” (Rom 1:18, 25). Fallen man takes the objective knowledge of general revelation and subjectively filters it through his sin orientation throughout the cognition process. The route from revelation to theology is interpretation, and natural man can only interpret in terms of his radical sin bias.

In spite of general revelation, the pagan world does not know the true and the living God because of the distorting nature of worldly wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:21). Fallen man’s intellectual sin bias is so basic and so complete that even when he is exposed to God’s truth in plain language through the special revelation of Scripture, he still does not know God’s truth in any spiritually significant sense (1 Corinthians 2:14). He knows but he does not know (Isaiah 6:9). The god of this age has blinded his mind (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is like an illiterate man with an open book in his hands (Isaiah 29:12). He sees God’s truth spelled out before him but he cannot grasp its meaning, for to rationally comprehend God’s truth is

“A little girl was sitting on her daddy’s lap and was playfully slapping his face. She could only slap his face because he allowed her to sit on his lap; she was not capable of this on her own. She had to be supported by him in order to slap him. God is like the father and unbelieving thought,” said Van Til, “is like the little girl. It uses reason to attack the source of reason. It operates on borrowed capital, as it were.”

to be persuaded by it and to submit to it in faith. To know the formal content of God’s special revelation and not to believe is to see without perceiving (cf. Acts 28:24-28).

The way to deal with fallen man is not to cater to his illusions by telling him he has the authority and ability to weigh the truth of God on the scales of autonomous reason. The way to deal with fallen man is to argue against his illusions and to expose Satan’s lie for what it is. For man to reject the true and living God and to seek to be as God is to choose death. And not just physical death but multi-dimensional death and radical death, death that reaches every area of life and penetrates to the very heart of life.

Man through sin has separated himself from God, but God in common grace continues to uphold life for both the just and the unjust. Fallen man continues to live and function not because of his worldview but in spite of it. Man experiences the effects of sin in a limited way because of God’s common grace, but in Hell unredeemed men will feel the effects of independence completely.

We must seek to show fallen man that his worldview contradicts his own life experience. Man values logic, but apart from God, there is no reason why the mental laws of logic should have

any true correspondence to objective reality. Man values science, but apart from God, there is no adequate basis for any real order and design in the universe or any assurance that man is really in touch with objective reality through his senses. Man values ethics, but apart from God, morals are merely changing conventions, and today's abomination can become tomorrow's virtue. Man values human personhood, but apart from God, man is but a higher animal or even an advanced machine, and personal existence is a temporary evolutionary fluke in an impersonal universe. Man values purpose and meaning, but apart from God, these have no real basis.

If fallen man is right in his worldview, then all in the world that is precious dies. The apologist must press home without compromise the point that philosophy and science based not upon Christ but upon the first principles of the world are "empty deceit" (Col 1:8) and "foolishness" (1 Cor 3:18-19).

Apart from the regenerating grace of God, fallen man will rebel against these arguments. He will continue to cling to his lie. All the Christian can do is to argue from the Bible that the man who denies the Christian God is truly a fool and that the forbidden fruit will indeed turn to gravel in his mouth. We plead and argue, but only God can cause the blind to see and the deaf to hear.

After seeking to drive the non-Christian "below the line of despair" by demonstrating the self-contradictory nature of his world, the Christian then points him to the one solid Rock upon which he can build a valid world and life view. And of course that one solid Rock is Christ. The apologist presents Christ as the Sovereign Savior and Lord and proclaims His Word as ultimate, self-authenticating truth. In the final analysis, we accept the authority of God's Word simply because it is God's Word. God can swear by no one higher than Himself (Heb 6:13), there is therefore no higher authority than God's Word upon which to base our acceptance of God's Word.

What then is the proper place for evidence in the apologetic task? Evidences must be presented in the defining context of the gospel message. It is in the context of the preached Word that God works His work of regenerating grace which enables the spiritually blind to see and believe. Evidences, no matter how compelling, do not convince those who have not submitted to God's Word in faith (Luke 16:31). Because of the noetic effects of sin ("noetic" relates to the intellect or the process of knowing), fallen man must be born from above in order to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Fallen man submits to the "arguments whereby [Holy Scripture] doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God" only in the context of "the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts" (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, 1.5).

In our witnessing, we do present evidence but only in the defining context of the Word. We have the historical evidences of miracles, especially the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and fulfilled prophecy. We have the testimonies of changed lives. We have a basis for science in the God who created an orderly universe of design and gave man both senses that really are in

touch with objective reality and rational minds with a logic that really does measure truth in the created realm. We have a basis for purpose, meaning and morality, for the ultimate reality is the personal God of Scripture and not an impersonal universe or impersonal axioms. We accept God as God and we find flowing out of this a world that is the real world, and everyone in their heart of hearts knows it.

Here we find the true common ground between Christian and non-Christian. They both live in the real world created by God and covered with His finger prints. They were both created in God's image. They both know in their heart of hearts that the God of Scripture is the true and the living God and that the Bible is His Book. But, the Christian and the non-Christian do not agree on this common ground. Only the born again Christian has admitted to himself what all men in their innermost being know to be true. The non-Christian remains self-deceived and is blinded by his love for Satan's lie of independence. All non-Christians will reject the claims of Christ in their determination to be independent because they never think nor act according to any principle other than their own supposed independence. Every thought contrary to Christianity which the unbeliever has results from his desire to set himself up as the independent judge of truth.

## APPLICATION

The Basic Structure of a Biblical Defense<sup>1</sup>

### I. A Christian Witness

1. Begin with a clear presentation of the gospel with the full assurance that it is true and fully defensible.
  - a. Ask for the opportunity to present the Christian worldview.
  - b. Present God, creation, fall, sin, man's condition, Christ's person and work, salvation, repentance, faith, and man's need for dependence on Christ rather than independence.
2. Call for the unbeliever to submit to his Creator and to use his mind to think dependently upon God rather than independently outside of God.
3. Answer honest questions of understanding and clarification.
  - a. Be sure to detect questions that are merely a smokescreen to keep the person from coming face to face with his need for God. One way to do this if it's not totally obvious is to ask, "If I answered this question to your satisfaction would you become a believer?"
  - b. Present Christian answers and Christian evidences within the framework of the Christian worldview.
4. Call for repentance and faith.

**"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer [or defense; Greek: apologia] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).**

<sup>1</sup> This structure is adapted from Richard L. Pratt Jr., *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), 85-97.

## II. A Christian Defense

Example: "I see no convincing evidence that the Bible is true; it's just a book written by men."

1. Answer from truth (Proverbs 26:4).
  - a. The principle: Do not answer a fool according to his philosophy or worldview lest you be like him. To argue from within his worldview is to encourage his rebellion and commitment to independence from God.
  - b. The application: Reason with him from the Bible.
    - i. Press him back to the Bible.
    - ii. Insist that the Bible is the only possible position.
  - c. Example:
    - i. My answer is rooted in the Bible (Acts 17:23-24).
      1. Allow me to present the Christian explanation for this question:
        - a. The evidence of Scripture, 1 Cor 15:3-4.
        - b. The evidence of the external world, 1 Cor 15:5-7.
        - c. The evidence of personal experience, 1 Cor 15:8.
      2. Expose the reason why the unbeliever rejects your answer. Ask the "Why" question to push him back to his starting point of self-authority or autonomy.
        - a. Why do you reject the message of the Bible?
        - b. Why do you reject its claim of inspiration?
        - c. What authority gives you the basis to reject the Bible?
      3. Appeal to the knowledge of God he already has.
        - a. Divine image within man.
        - b. Revelation of God in creation.
        - c. God's Spirit working through his conscience bears witness to the truth of Scripture.
      4. Conclusion: He has no credible reason as to why he rejects Christ, but his pride (1 Cor 1:20).
2. Answer from Folly (Proverbs 26:5).
  - a. The principle: Answer him according to his folly (what his folly deserves) by showing him what God says about his worldview.
  - b. The application: Do a brief internal critique of his worldview showing him that his position reduces to absurdity. Turn the unbeliever's beliefs back on him.
    - i. A worldview based on nothing cannot account for anything.
    - ii. Show him that in his heart is a theist, for atheism presupposes theism in practice. He borrows from the Christian worldview to make sense out of his experience (he uses the laws of logic, has a judicial sentiment, lives according to basic moral standards, seeks relationships, etc.).
    - iii. Example:
      - Based on his worldview, knowledge is impossible. He cannot account for anything he believes from within his worldview. He continues to make absolute or superstatements without authority.

- His worldview reduces to his own arbitrary self-invented ideas. His independent commitment is based on his own independent commitment. "The god he believes in is the one he sees in the mirror," –John MacArthur.
  - How can he possibly know enough to stand in judgment of the God of the Bible. His "certain" positions (i.e. superstatements) are actually uncertain as they are based on his own limited conclusions.
  - In denying theism, he has assumed theism. He is self-deceived, for in an effort to deny God he assumes God for the laws of logic (such as the law of non-contradiction) that allow him to make assertions. In biblical terms, he is a fool (Ps 14:1; Rom 1:21).
  - The unbeliever is proving that Christianity is true by borrowing its foundation to assert its unbelief. He is saying—given God's creation, man's reflection of God's image, and God's laws of logic—I choose to rebel against God.
3. Press your apologetic advantage.
- a. The Bible can explain everything. God created everything and gives life, natural order, and laws of logic.
  - b. The unbeliever has no credible argument against God (1 Cor 1:20).
  - c. Return to the gospel and use God's Word to bring conviction.
  - d. Never underestimate the power of the Word of God and the gospel.
    - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom 1:16).
    - "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17)
    - "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18).
    - "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).
    - "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" (2 Tim 3:16-17).
    - "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2).
    - "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:12-13).

Next week: God the Father.