



R E M E D I A L
Christianity

Correcting Deficiencies in Popular Christianity

#5 – Believing in God

With Study Questions

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Believing in God

Romans 1:18-23

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is ⁵manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Romans 1:18-25).

Review

We have, in our Remedial Christianity series, discussed: (1) the need to recognize that there must be a starting place for knowledge; how is it I know the things I know? (2) that, at least from a Christian world view, the Bible is the starting place of all knowledge, ethics and truth; it is nonsensical to affirm the veracity of the Bible by evaluating it through lesser authorities, (3) what the Bible is actually about – a brief overview, (4) why we should believe the Bible – because its truth is authoritatively self-evident, and (5) the main topic of the Bible, God – that God is good, reasonable and knowable. We will now continue our discussion of God – specifically, why should we believe in God?

An Assumption

There is an assumption that every prophet, apostle, teacher, evangelist, or pastor in the Bible seems to make – that there is a God. Not only do the wise and inspired teachers we read of in Scripture make this assumption, they assume their audience knows it as well. As a remedial Christian I was fascinated when I came to realize that the Bible never offers any type of proof for the existence of God.

The Bible warns against following false gods. The Bible also gives correction regarding false views of the true God. But no one in the Bible ever does that which is so common among remedial Christians today – that is to seek to give an argument for the existence of God. Why do you suppose that is?

An Overbearing Task

I remember feeling this great responsibility to provide a plausible argument for the existence of God. Similar to my desire to defend the truth of the Bible, I laid upon my shoulders the task of defending the existence of God. Many of my methods were the same with God as with the Bible.

Evidential Proof

I marched in the testimony of science. Archeologists are daily making finds which affirm the existence of God. In the April 12, 2003 edition of the *L. A. Times* we read in headlines, "Israeli Kings No Myth, New Data Suggests." I would most certainly have added this clipping to my seemingly undeniable evidence for the existence of God.

The historical record was also in my arsenal. There are numerous extra-biblical sources which affirm the truth of the Bible and therefore the existence of the God who inspired it. And, of course, we must also give heed to the changed lives. A changed life is surely a great argument for the existence of God until one begins to notice that there are many people whose lives change who do not believe in God at all. Fulfilled prophecies also seem to be very persuasive. Unless, of course, the person you're speaking with doesn't believe the prophecy was ever made in the first place.

Historical Proofs

Then there are the historical proofs for the existence of God; things like the cosmological, teleological and ontological argument.

Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument, simply stated, is an argument based on cause and effect. As Maria sang in *The Sound of Music*, "Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could." Everything must have a cause. It only makes sense that God is the first cause, the uncaused cause. Do I believe this to be true? Yes. Is it the only plausible explanation for the world we see? I think so. But believing it and proving it are two different things. The cosmological argument may be a pretty good argument, but it certainly isn't proof.

Teleological Argument

The teleological argument is the argument of design. There seems to be a design to the universe and it is unreasonable to believe that there is a design without a designer. If I found a watch in the jungle, it would be silly for me to ignore the fact that a watchmaker must exist. This is quite a compelling argument. And quite frankly, I can't think of any better explanation for the glorious designs we see than to acknowledge a master designer. But the watch may have been placed in the jungle by the warlords of the planet Zakon. This may sound silly but people often believe silly things. The fact that the teleological argument is the most reasonable explanation for the reality we observe is not necessarily proof—a good argument perhaps, but not proof.

Ontological Argument

About a thousand years ago, Anselm came up with the ontological argument. I will mention it only briefly due to its difficulty. It may not sound compelling, but some

great minds view it as quite a convincing argument. It goes something like this, “God is a being than which no greater being can be conceived. Since being is greater than non-being, God must exist.” This argument, of course, assumes that being is greater than non-being. I’ll bet by now you’re wondering what to have for lunch.

An Infinite Regress

The chore of proving the existence of God is daunting. And it generally leads into conversations of infinite regress. I march in my facts; you march in yours. I deny yours; you deny mine. I point out the unreasonable nature of your position; you do the same to me, *ad nauseum*.

God Probably Exists?

It seems that if there is a God, you shouldn’t have to be a philosophy professor or master logician (man of logic) to figure out that He exists. Nor should you have to be a debate champion in order to convince others that He exists. Add to this that the above arguments only assert probability. Are we to suppose that on judgment day God will judge the unbelievers by stating that they should have known that He probably existed?

As stated earlier, there is no argument anywhere in the Bible for the existence of God. Again, why do you suppose that is?

Many of the arguments I have given so far have come from great thinkers such as Anselm, Aquinas, and Aristotle. More recently we see the very popular arguments coming from fine thinkers such as J. P. Moreland, Gary Habermas, Lee Strobel, and Josh McDowell. We don’t, however, see this kind of argument coming from Augustine, Calvin, or many other Reformed thinkers. Maybe you’ve never heard of any of these scholars. Let’s appeal to someone you have heard of.

David’s Argument – The Apostle Paul’s Explanation

How do you suppose David, speaking with divine authority makes an argument for the existence of God? We needn’t wonder – it’s in Scripture and his argument is simple, **“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1)**. Seems a bit *ad hominem* (an attack on the person rather than the merit of the argument). It seems even more *ad hominem* when we realize that when the Bible speaks of a fool it carries the notion, not of an ignorant person but, of an immoral person. How can this be? The Apostle Paul explains,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is ⁵manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like

corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Romans 1:18-25).

It would be unwise of me, in my conversations with humans, to ignore what the Bible says about them. I need to examine the scouting report. What do I learn about mankind in this passage? Let's go back into this passage (noticing the "therefores," "because," and "sinces" at the beginning of the verses) and see what we learn about people.

In **verses 23 and 25** we learn that people "**worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**" (could "creature" include things like human reason and science?). We also learn in verse 25 that the reason they do this is because they made an exchange; they "**exchanged the truth for the lie.**" This also means that they, at least at some level, had the truth and made a willful exchange.

In **verse 24** we learn that the worshiping of the creature (the creature obviously very limited in terms of holding men accountable for their actions) is inextricably related to immoral behavior. They dishonored "**their bodies among themselves.**" People will generally choose worldviews which allow them to do as they please. People will always follow their strongest inclination at the moment – they must.

In **verse 22** we learn that the culture of people who exchange the truth for a lie are not necessarily criminals who are readily willing to admit their sin. It is said of them, "**Professing to be wise, they became fools.**" It is one thing to help a professed sinner who seeks the mercy of God. It is quite another thing when you have, (as with the Greeks, the Romans, and today's post-modern, humanistic, academic cultures), anti-Christian thinking heralded as wise and intellectual.

In **verse 21** we learn that this foolishness and darkness was a result of the futility (ineffectual) of their thoughts. All this happened "**because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful.**" We now begin to see that the foolishness, darkness, and futile thinking was not a matter of having insufficient evidence or argumentation. It was a matter of denying what they already knew to be true. But how do they know the truth of the existence of God?

Verse 20 tells us that "**by the things that are made**" God's "**invisible attributes are clearly seen.**" This would include "**His eternal power and Godhead.**" Furthermore, we learn that it is so evident that men are "**without excuse.**" So much for an argument of probability! He doesn't say that men will have a *poor* excuse or a *little* excuse or that they *should* know of the true God. He says they *do* know.

In **verse 19** we learn that this knowledge is not discursive. In other words, it's not that men need to figure it out. We don't look at the stars then somehow reckon somebody must have made them. It is not merely that God has shown men what may be known of Him, but it is "**manifest [clearly apparent] in them.**" In other words, all

men know there is a God. And not merely a god of their own making. All men know that there is one true God. So why don't they believe?

That question is answered in **verse 18** where we are told that men **"suppress the truth in unrighteousness."** Perhaps now the argument of David makes more sense to us. Man's rejection of God is a sin – the sin of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12).

The Sequential Order of Darkness

Men suppress the truth (a truth that has been clearly shown to them and made clearly apparent in them), not because of ignorance but in unrighteousness. Men know there is a God but willfully choose to neglect glorifying Him as God. As a result of this they become futile in their thinking; their foolish hearts are darkened, and in this darkness they profess a twisted and perverted wisdom. But professing to be wise they are fools. The end result of this immoral foolishness is the worship of the creation rather than the Creator. Instead of serving a wise, all-powerful, benevolent Master and Giver of life and all good things, they serve the dust.

God in the Flesh

There is nothing more blatantly obvious than the existence of God. As Christians, we are to view the ranting of men denying the existence of God (no matter how well dressed in academic verbiage) as darkened foolishness. And this God, who saves lost souls from their own rebellion, has revealed Himself in the person and work of Christ, **"For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).**

A litmus test as to whether we believe in the true God is our response to Christ. Jesus taught, **"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also" (John 8:19).** God became a man who dwelt among us and died for us. It is critically important to understand that even though the Bible teaches that all men know there is a God in a way that leaves them without excuse, it does not teach that all men know God in a saving way. It is the power of the cross alone which delivers men from the futility of their own darkened hearts. It is the cross of Christ alone that saves souls and unites men with the true Holy God. May we ever trust in Him.

Questions for Study

1. What assumption do we see made by prophets and teachers in Scripture (page 1)?
2. What are the weaknesses of evidential and historical proofs for the existence of God (pages 2)?
3. Give a brief explanation of the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments (pages 2, 3).
4. Why is an argument which asserts that God probably exists a poor argument (page 3)?
5. What was David's argument against the unbeliever (page 3)?
6. How does the Apostle Paul explain the reasonableness of David's assertion (pages 3-5)?
7. What is the sequential order of darkness (page 5)?
8. How has God revealed Himself to humanity (page 5)?
9. How does one know if they have a genuine, saving relationship with God (page 5)?