

Big Questions

2. Does God Exist?

September 25, 2022

Welcome to week 2 of our series “Big Questions.” Over the next few weeks, we will tackle some of life’s deepest questions, like Why is there suffering, Is there more to life than this? Today we are looking the biggest question of all: Does God exist?

I made the choice to follow Christ when I was a junior in high school. During my first few years as a Christian, I was a mixture of enthusiastic faith and nagging doubt. When I was at small groups or retreat, I was amazed by God’s truth and love. But then, when I least expected it, a stab of doubt would hit me. I would wonder, how do I know God is real and not just my imagination? Am I just talking to myself when I pray?

I was not living in a faith-filled household. My father was an engineer working on nuclear plants. He operated entirely on cause and effect – if it can’t be measured it isn’t real. No one else in my family was following Christ, so I was the odd duck around the dining room table. Most of the time I wanted to prove to them that God was real. At other moments, I’d wish someone could prove to me that God was real. Maybe you’ve asked yourself that question at some point: Is God real?

Today, I am not going to attempt to prove that God exists. That’s because no one can prove God’s existence. And --- no one can prove that God does *not* exist. Belief in God is called Theism, to believe that there is no God is called Atheism. Both are systems of thinking and believing that must be compared with each other to see which makes the most sense. I am indebted to Tim Keller’s work and John Ortberg for their explanation of these ideas.

First, belief in God makes sense because the universe exists. How did the universe get started? Why is there something rather than nothing?

In 1931 a Catholic priest in Belgium proposed what we now call the Big Bang Theory. (No, not the TV show, the scientific theory.) It says that in the beginning, all of the matter of the universe was compressed into a point of infinite density— called the singularity. Imagine the entire universe existing as one tiny point, smaller than an atom. Then it explodes and the universe comes into being. The universe didn’t exist, and then it did.

This begs the question, where did the matter for the big bang come from? It was either created by something that wasn’t physical --- God --- or matter always existed in some form. So, something is eternal – either God or matter.

Physics tells us that nothing cannot produce something. Everything must come from something that already exists. Nothing just magically appears. Everything you see

--- a chair, a squirrel, a volcano --- every object or event comes from something else. Everything that has a beginning has a cause. The only other possibility is that the universe is something that can come from nothing. If you want to make your mind hurt, try to imagine true nothingness: not just empty space, but no space, no time, no matter, no energy, nothing. Then with no explanation, no cause, the universe explodes into being.

If you want to be an atheist, you have to believe that the physical universe created itself. You can't prove that; it takes faith. That is why the universe points to God. This is **Romans 1:20** *For 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 people are without excuse.* Maybe this is why people often feel close to God in nature – because nature silently points to God.

A second reason that belief in God makes sense is that the universe not only exists, but has Evidence of design. If you found a cell phone on a beach, you would not say, "Wow, isn't it great that this phone just formed itself out of random bits of sand and water in the ocean? No, it would be ridiculous to think that a highly sophisticated item, such as a cell phone, would just happen to come into existence through random chance. If you found a cell phone you would assume either a. someone made the phone (depending on whether it is Apple or Android, you might make a judgment about whether the phone is any good) or b. "Somebody lost their phone." Maybe you'd look around and see who might have dropped it.

Studying our universe, we see that it shows evidence of design. There are a striking number of conditions that would have to be just right for life to arise from the universe. It turns out that those conditions *are* just right. Here are a couple nerdy examples:

First, the proportion of the mass of a neutron of hydrogen that's converted to energy during nuclear fusion is 0.007. If it were 0.006, the whole universe would be hydrogen, and there would be no life. If it were 0.008, there would be no hydrogen and therefore no life. The proportions that are exactly what is required to produce life.

Second, water – a basic building block of life -- has a unique property. As water gets colder, it contracts until it freezes, and then once it freezes it expands. If it did not have this very strange property, oceans and lakes would freeze from the bottom up. They would freeze solid which would make ocean life, and life in general, impossible.

I could go on, because there are dozens of variables: the strength of gravity, the properties of carbon, the exact rate of the expansion of the Big Bang, and on and on. These things have to be exactly fine-tuned for life to exist. And it turns out that they are exactly fine-tuned. The precise orbit of the earth, its distance from the sun, the existence of a moon that keeps the earth tilted on its axis at 23.5 degrees makes a climate that can sustain life. In fact, physicists say that we live in the Goldilocks Zone.

Not too hot, not too cold, just right. A physicist by the name of Freeman Dyson said, "It's as if the universe saw us coming." These conditions make sense if there is a God.¹

Moral Intuition

C.S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity* that when people are arguing, you almost never hear them say, "Do what I want because I'm stronger and I can make you do it." When we argue, we actually say things like, "But it's not fair. But it's not right. But it's not just." In other words, when we argue, we show that we believe there is a moral standard, and that we aren't just making it up.

Now somebody might claim that morals are just a matter of personal preference — what's right depends on the person. But if you attack one of their values, then it's different. If you say, "I think prejudice is okay; I think racism is a good idea; I think exploiting children is fine," you will see that they don't think *those* are just personal preferences. They believe those things are morally wrong, no matter how anybody might happen to feel about them. Everybody knows there are moral standards that are true in every place and time.

The apostle Paul wrote about this a long time ago. **Romans 2:15** says, "*They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.*" These are very central dynamics to the human condition. The fact that our knowing right and wrong is baked into our universe is a very powerful reason for believing in God, but it is not the best reason. The moral argument by itself does not prove the existence of a personal God. But it points to something that is beyond our materialistic existence.

Miracles

One of the reasons I am convinced of God's realities is that I have seen many things that cannot be explained apart from the power of God. For example, some years ago, we had a guest speaking on healing. He asked people to pray for one another all at the same time. While people were praying, one woman felt something in her ears. She was losing hearing in spite of wearing strong hearing aids. The doctors said that they couldn't do anything else. But when she was being prayed for, she felt something happening in her ears. She pulled the hearing aids out, and she could hear normally! She went to a restaurant with friends and for the first time she could talk on the phone there.

So here we have a woman who couldn't hear well, she receives prayer in the name of Jesus, and instantly she can hear normally. How do you explain that apart from God?

¹ *Divine Revelation*, John Ortberg

A while ago, I was facing a troubling situation, and I thought to myself, it would be great to talk with Greg Hendricks. Greg had spoken at our church months before and I respected his ability to hear from God. But Greg had never called me before. Then a day or so later, Greg called me. He said, "I just felt like I should call and see how you were doing." He went on to give me just the godly perspective I needed at that moment. Coincidence? Maybe, but I find that coincidences happen a lot more often when I pray. Does that prove the existence of God? No. But atheism struggles to come up with adequate explanations of these things.

Taken all together, all these reasons show that it is not irrational to believe there is a God. In fact, many very prominent scientists and scholars are followers of Jesus. Dr. Francis Collins led the Human Genome Project, which mapped out the human DNA's genomes for the first time. He also led the National Institute of Health. It's been said that millions of people don't realize that Dr. Collins saved their lives.

To believe in God does not require us to put our brain in hibernation. We don't have to deny the validity of scientific discoveries in order to be Christians. In fact, belief in God is consistent with reality. Atheism cannot be proven; it requires a level of faith, as well. Perhaps you already believe in God. Most Americans do. But not all believe in the same God.

For most people, the question is not, "Does God exist," but rather, "**Does the God I believe in exist?**" That is, when people say they believe in God, they are not all talking about the same thing. By saying they believe in God, they could mean that they believe in an impersonal cosmic force, or multiple gods, or Zeus, or Elvis, or the God of the Bible.

Humans can easily make God in their own image, but there is one person in whom the image of God is clear. **Hebrews 11:1-3** *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

This scripture tells us that **to know what God is like, look at Jesus.** Verse 3 calls Jesus the exact representation of God's being. That's because Jesus is God. He was not created, he is the creator. Verse 2 says, "through whom he created the universe." Jesus came to this earth to redeem the humanity he created.

When we look at the words and actions of Jesus Christ, they reveal some truths about God. First, **God loves us.** He doesn't love just humanity as a whole, he also loves us as individuals. God works for good in our lives. We are valuable to him. If the God you believe in does not love people, then it is not the God Jesus revealed.

Second, **God shows grace and mercy.** Our sin has consequences, but God will forgive us when we ask. God's grace covers us. He empowers us because of who He is, not because we are good enough.

Third, **God hears and answers us.** God is not remote and uninvolved, he knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows what is happening in your life.

Do you believe in that God? Craig Groeschel writes that sometimes we fall into living as Christian atheists. That is, we believe in God, but we live like he doesn't exist. We believe he cares about us, but we worry anyway. We believe he loves us, but we carry a low self-image, as if we have higher standards than God. We believe God forgives, but we still feel shame.

Seeking Jesus will help us relate to God as He actually is, not just as an extension of our experiences and past. We will not create God in our image or shape Him by our past history. No one can prove or disprove God's existence.

Whether we believe in God or not is a question of faith. Not whether we have faith, but rather, what we have faith in; either matter or God. Today, ask God to help you see Him, and He will.