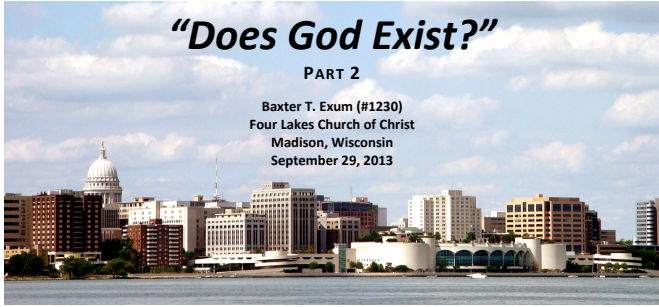


"Does God Exist?"

PART 2

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If you were here two weeks ago, you might remember that we started a brief series of lessons on the existence of God. And as we studied, we learned that the question of God's existence is a very important question. If there is a God, then God is all that really matters in this life, and if there is not a God, then nothing really matters at all. If he does exist, then there is an eternal heaven to be gained and an eternal hell to be avoided, and this means everything to us.

As we began our study two weeks ago, I made a brief reference to the nature of the evidence for God's existence. We cannot prove God the same way we can prove gravity. There is no experiment we can perform. We will never be able to see a piece of God in a test tube in a lab. And yet we learned that our own legal system recognizes the value of a "prima facie" case. That little phrase refers to a situation where enough evidence is available to establish the presumption of a fact, which, unless it can be refuted, legally stands as a fact. In other words, you can look at the available evidence and come to a conclusion unless that evidence can be refuted. We discussed the case of going to bed at night, but being awakened at four in the morning by the sound of thunder. When you get up two hours later, the grass is wet, there are puddles all over the place, the car in the driveway is covered with little droplets of water, and so on. In this situation, we can make a prima facie case that it rained overnight. Of course, someone could refute that evidence if they could show some other reason why everything is wet outside. But on the surface, unless it can be refuted, the conclusion is that it rained. In a similar way, when we first look at the evidence, we can make a very reasonable conclusion that God exists, and we can hold to that belief until the evidence can be refuted.

Two weeks ago, then, we considered two of the reasons why I personally believe in God. First of all, we studied what is sometimes referred to as the Law of Cause and Effect. The idea here is that every effect must have an adequate cause. And we looked at that rather obvious statement in Hebrews 3:4, where the Bible says, *"For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God."* The first part of that statement is a universally accepted truth. When we see a house, we can safely reach the conclusion that something or someone caused it to happen. The same thing applies to everything we see around us. The Universe is not an illusion, it has not been here forever, it did not create itself; therefore, as an effect, the Universe must have had an adequate cause. That cause (we believe) is God.

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The argument is: If we are governed by nothing but the survival of the fittest, this is a decision that no one would ever make. No one would ever put themselves in danger to try to save another person.

With this in mind, it was the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who said, "Two things fill me with wonder and awe – the starry heavens above and the moral law within." That is what we are talking about here this morning, the moral law within. Even without being trained, all people have some sense of what is right and what is wrong. People may disagree over what is right and wrong, people may disagree over where the line needs to be drawn, but the fact that we have a conscience tells us that a line needs to be drawn somewhere.

We think of what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 2. In Romans 2, Paul wrote about the Gentiles who lived before the Law of Christ. The Jews, of course, had their own special law from God (the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, and so on), but the Gentiles did not have that law. With that in mind, notice what Paul says in Romans 2:14-15,

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them...

As I understand this passage, those Gentiles who lived before the time of Christ knew by "instinct" that certain things were right and certain things were wrong. And so, even without any kind of written law from God, they would be judged based on how well they followed their hearts. In the next verse (in Romans 2:16), Paul goes on to explain that there is a day coming when we will all be judged by the gospel of Christ, but before the time of Christ, the Gentiles were accountable to the law of the heart, what we would describe today as the "conscience." Without a written law, God would either let them into heaven or send them into punishment based on how well they followed the conscience. Our argument today, then, is that the conscience was created by God. The conscience is not always a safe guide – the conscience can be improperly trained, a person can violate his conscience, a conscience can be ignored so long that it can become calloused – but just the existence of the conscience, the existence of some kind of moral compass, is proof that God exists.

Someone might say: No, morality simply represents a set of standards that we agree on in a particular society. But I would back that up just a little bit and remind us of what happened at the Nuremberg Trial at the end of World War II. The Nazi's defense, of course, was that they were following the laws of their nation at the time they were acting, they were following the standard set by their society; therefore, they argued that they should be acquitted of any wrongdoing. The international community, however, came together, and came to the conclusion that there is a higher moral law, that there are certain things people should not do to one another, even though a particular culture might agree that those actions are acceptable. The International Criminal Court, therefore, was not based on the laws of one particular nation, but the court appealed to the concept of crimes against humanity – regardless of what one set of laws might say, some things are just wrong. We learn, then, that not all moral codes are from God, but the concept of morality itself is from God. The concept of morality (the concept of right and wrong) is not something that can create itself or evolve on its own.

Two weeks ago we also looked at a second very closely related truth: If it is clear that something has been designed, then it should also be clear that a designer has been involved. Or, as we put it up here: Design Demands a Designer. We looked at what Paul said in Romans 1:20, the statement that we can learn something about God simply by looking at His creation. We can know something about God's *"invisible attributes"* because those attributes and God's *"divine nature"* have been *"clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."* And with that, we considered a number of examples from the natural world where even evolutionary scientists will sometimes accidentally admit the presence of design – from lions' skulls, to sea otters, to the archerfish, and even to the little insect, the tiny insect with gears in its hips. But again, the main point was: If something shows clear and compelling evidence of having been designed, then the only logical conclusion is that a designer must have been involved.

This morning, I would like for us to continue in our series of lessons on the subject of God's existence, and I would like to introduce two more reasons why I personally believe in God.

I. The two reasons are slightly related, but I would like for us to start this morning by thinking about THE EXISTENCE OF MORALITY.

To me, it is interesting that nearly every human being seems to have some kind of moral compass. In other words, unless a person is struggling with severe mental illness and unless someone has been taught and conditioned otherwise, everyone understands that it is wrong to torture and murder a 3-year old child. That right there is a universally held belief. Even without being taught, even without the word of God, everybody knows that that is wrong. There are certain things that we ought not to do. There are certain things that are simply wrong. So the question is: How did we arrive at this very basic concept of right and wrong? Is morality something that could have evolved over time? How can right and wrong, and love and hate, and guilt and remorse, and kindness and thankfulness evolve over millions of years? How can the survival of the fittest explain moral concepts like right and wrong?

Animals, of course, do not have a sense of right and wrong. If a bull gores a man, we do not arrest the bull, and certainly we do not put the bull on trial. Instead, we would normally build a sturdier fence around the bull, and then we put up a sign warning people to stay away. And we do not put the bull on trial, because we understand that the bull has no concept of right and wrong. The bull has no sense of moral obligation.

We think of the black widow spider. Most of us know how the black widow got its name. After mating, the female will often turn around and very quickly bite the male's head off and then will very quickly eat the male in order to provide a little extra nourishment for the eggs. So, the male and the female get together, they finish the act, she gets hungry, and she eats the first thing she sees, which is him! Now, if this were to happen between humans, if a woman were to chew off her husband's head right before eating the rest of him, we would have some serious issues there! There would be an investigation, we would have a trial, and the woman would probably be facing some jail time. The point is: Among humans, we have a sense of morality that does not exist among the rest of the natural world. As humans, there are things that we ought and ought not to do.

C.S. Lewis, the noted professor from Oxford University in England, illustrated the sense of moral obligation by suggesting the idea of a man drowning in a swiftly-flowing river. Another man stands on the bank and is moved by two instincts: 1.) He has a desire to jump in and save the man, and 2.) He also has the desire to stay safely right there where he is on the bank of that river. The stronger of these two instincts is obviously the desire to preserve his own life, and yet at this point, something higher kicks in and convinces the man that it is his duty to put himself in danger and to try to save the other man's life. And so the man jumps into the river.

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II. There is a second somewhat related idea that I would like for us to think about this morning, and that is: I believe in God, because mankind seems to have some kind of built-in desire to worship. We might refer to this as a RELIGIOUS INSTINCT.

I am not exactly sure how to label this, but the idea is: People have always felt the need to worship something. In fact, as I understand it, no society of atheists has ever been discovered. We go into the deepest of jungles and across the most desolate places on the face of the earth, and when we discover some new tribe or group of people, they are already worshipping something. In fact (almost as a side thought here), sometimes I wonder if this is the motivating force behind so many people taking the Lord's name in vain. If you spend time with some of the most worldly people, if something surprising or terrible happens, they will cry out, "Oh, my God!" Why is that? It is possible that it ties in to what we are studying here: That people seem to have a natural tendency to reach out to some kind of god or higher power. Of course, from an evolutionary point of view, we are at the top of the progression – we are the end result. And yet even though this is the assumption, for some reason, we as humans have this need to worship something or someone greater than ourselves.

King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, seems to refer to this general idea back in Ecclesiastes 3:11, where he referred to God and said, *"He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end."* And so it seems we have a little clue here: In our hearts, God has placed the idea of eternity, the idea that there is something beyond us. Sometimes we refer to having a "God-shaped hole" in our hearts. There is something in us that only God can satisfy. And for that reason, every culture we have ever studied has worshipped something.

When he preached in the city of Athens in Acts 17, the apostle Paul said basically the same thing (p. 1735). The apostle Paul started his presentation on the Areopagus in Athens, Greece, with a kind of compliment. He started out (in verses 22-23) by saying, *"Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'"* The Athenians, some of the most educated and enlightened people in the ancient world, had this almost instinctual need to worship. They had thousands of idols in the city of Athens, but just in case they missed one, they had put up an altar to the *"Unknown God."* Paul then said (continuing in verse 23),

Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His children." Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

There is so much we could look at here, but in light of our study, notice (in verse 27) how Paul says that God created the human race, so *“...that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him* (like reaching out into the darkness to find something we know is there), *though He is not far from each one of us.”* To me, it seems as if God created us with some kind of almost instinctual need to go looking for Him. And I would point out: Those who do not believe in God have a rather difficult time trying to explain this using the atheistic evolutionary model.

One of the leading theories says that very early on as creatures were developing the ability to think and reason, early man looked at nature and started ascribing supernatural attributes to various parts of the natural world. And so they started out with the god of fire, and the god of the sea, and the god of lightning, and the god of the sky, and so on. And over time, mankind eventually started to imagine that there was one god over all of these other gods. The assumption is, then, that the idea of there being one god evolved from the idea of many gods. My understanding, though, is that the evidence is against this. The deeper archaeologists dig, the more they find that the concept of deity started with a belief not in many gods, but in one God. Over time, there has been a de-evolution from monotheism to polytheism. This is true of the Native Americans (and their understanding of the Great Spirit), this is true of ancient Assyrian culture, this is true of ancient China, this is true of ancient India, this is true of ancient Egypt, and so on. These cultures started with the idea of one God, and only later did they develop the concept of multiple gods. So, there are some problems with the theory that mankind developed its own concept of God from nature.

Sometimes I think about it in this way: If there is no God, why would the entire human race ever develop the idea of God? If I am at the top of the evolutionary progression, why would I invent some being that is greater than me? Why would I ever invent some being that has the ability to in some way limit my freedom? In reality, it is actually the other way around: Instead of inventing a god who can limit our freedom, those who deny the existence of God do so in order to escape responsibility for the way they are living.

But the point in bringing this up is that the worldwide need to worship something, a need that shows itself in all cultures at all points in world history, this need can really only be explained by the existence of God and that God (as Paul said in Acts 17) put that need to *“seek God”* in our hearts.

Conclusion:

This morning, then, we have looked at two additional reasons for believing in God – the existence of morality and the seemingly natural impulse to go looking for something or someone to worship. When we take God out of the equation, both of these are very difficult to explain from a purely evolutionary point of view.

Lord willing, I will be speaking at the Rice Lake, Wisconsin, congregation next Sunday morning. And then I hope we can jump back into this series two weeks from today with three more reasons for believing in God.

I'd like for us to close this lesson by referring back to Paul's words in Acts 17. Why does any of this really matter? Toward the end of that passage (in Acts 17:30-31), Paul referred to the fact that at one time God had *“overlooked the times of ignorance,”* however, *“God is now declaring...that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”* We can know something about God by looking at the world around us. We can come to a reasonable conclusion that God exists. However, to know what God actually wants us to do, we need the Scriptures. And in the Scriptures, we find that God's Son died for our sins, and that in response, we must repent. That is, we must change the way we

are living. If we are in the habit of getting drunk, that has to stop. If we are in the habit of ignoring the poor, that has to stop. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change in the way we live. And, as Paul explains, if we fail to repent, there is a Day of Judgment out there on the horizon.

Once we have come to that realization, once we change our minds concerning sin, we are then ready to be buried with Christ in baptism. In our own way (at God's direction), we reenact the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. We allow ourselves to be briefly dipped under the water for the forgiveness of our sins. It is so simple; the world has a way of tripping over it. But for those who accept it, the good news is God's power for our salvation. If you have any questions or if you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, let us know, but if you are ready to become a Christian right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com