

# Does God Exist?

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This morning I'd like for us to start a three part series with the goal of strengthening our faith. We are living in a society where we can no longer assume that most people around us believe in God, in his word, or in his son, Jesus Christ. Not only that, but from time to time, many of us have doubts, or maybe we need our own faith strengthened. And then there is the challenge of reaching out to our friends and family. Many times, it's not really a matter of what the Bible teaches on an issue, but it's a matter of: Why should we even believe in the Bible? Why should we even care what it says? And I say that because if we do not believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God, then who really cares what it says? And I don't say that to be disrespectful at all, but I say that to emphasize that often we need to back up a few steps before opening the Bible to try to prove something.

I was reading a book this week that pointed out the difference between Peter's approach in Acts 2 and Paul's approach in Acts 17. In Acts 2, Peter was speaking to a huge crowd of people with a solid Jewish background, and in his sermon on that day, he argued and presented evidence from the word of God. He quoted scripture, and then he applied those passages to Jesus, ***"This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel,"*** and so on. He could do that because the people not only knew who Joel was, but they respected him as being a messenger from God. Peter's approach, then, was to open the word of God and apply it to those who were listening. That is what we usually do here - we take a passage of scripture, we explain it, and then we apply it to our lives

We see a different approach, though, in Acts 17 (our scripture reading this morning), and the reason for the different approach is: In Acts 17, the apostle Paul is speaking on the Areopagus in Athens, Greece, and those in Paul's audience were very much different from the crowd in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Those in Acts 17 did not believe in God; or, more accurately, they believed in many gods. They were pagan philosophers. Paul, then, does not base his message on the prophets; these people do not care about the prophets. And so we find that Paul has to back it up a bit. Instead of starting with scripture, Paul has to start by introducing the concept of the one true and living God. And instead of scripture, he uses some of their own poets to make the argument.

I would suggest, then, that the world we are living in today is a lot more like the crowd in Acts 17 than the crowd in Acts 2, especially here in Madison. In other words, if I want to reach my neighbor with the gospel, there is a pretty good chance that I can't just turn to some scripture and say, "Hey, you need to obey this."

They don't care about the scriptures. That might have worked 50 or 60 years ago, where most people had some concept of God and some respect for his word, but the world has changed.

So, this morning, I want to give just an overview of some of the reasons why I believe in God. Next week I hope we can go on to study some of the reasons why I believe the Bible is the word of God. And then, after I get back from preaching up in Rice Lake in a few weeks, I want us to study some reasons why I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. And the purpose of this short series is two-fold: 1.) To strengthen our own faith, and 2.) To hopefully give us some tools as we reach out to the Acts 17-type world around us. We have studied some of these concepts before through the years, and we have done so in great detail, but today I want to do more of an overview. And our question today is: Does God exist?

As we get into this, I would make one note concerning the nature of the evidence for God's existence, and that is, we cannot scientifically demonstrate God's existence in the same way that we demonstrate gravity. We cannot do an experiment and show a little piece of God in a test tube. However, even our own legal system recognizes that a fact can be proven even without the demonstration of some kind of experiment. We look around us, and our own legal system recognizes the validity of a "prima facie" case. You can look up "prima facie" in a legal dictionary, and you will find that it comes from two Latin words – "first" and "face," and it 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. You can look at the available evidence and come to a reasonable conclusion unless that evidence can be refuted. Here is an example that is very easy for us to picture these days: Imagine going to bed at night. You wake up at four in the morning to the sound of thunder, and when you get up two hours later, you find that all of the grass is wet, you look outside, you see that there are puddles in the streets, and there are water droplets all over your car. In this situation, you can make a prima facie case that it rained overnight. Of course, someone could come in and 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.

I. **So to begin with, one reason why I personally believe in God is because of the LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT.**

And the idea is: Everything we see around us had to have a cause. The universe is an effect, and the Law of Cause and Effect states that every effect has to have an adequate cause. I know we are not basing our arguments here on the Bible – after all, that would be some circular reasoning to try to use the Bible to try to prove God exists – however, I find it interesting that the Bible does at least state this argument. The passage is found in Hebrews 3:4 (p. 1871). In Hebrews 3:4, the author states the obvious, ***"For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God."*** I just want us to look at the first part of that verse, ***"Every house is built by someone."*** To most people, that is a rather obvious statement. As far as I know, all of us here this morning live in some kind of structure – maybe a house, maybe an apartment building – and when we look at the structures where we live, we can safely come to the conclusion that somebody built those structures. You may not know WHO built the place where you live. Maybe you never SAW the people actually building your home. But you cannot deny that somebody built your house. Your house is an effect, and all effects must have an adequate cause. Your house did not build itself. And that is this argument in a nutshell. Every effect must have an adequate cause.

Some might make the argument that the Universe has just been here forever, and yet even most scientists today have been forced to abandon that theory, based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics which states

that all closed systems are eventually headed toward a state of equilibrium. In other words, stuff has a way of slowing down, and cooling off, and wearing down. And if that law is true of the universe, there must have been a time at some point in the past where everything was originally “wound up” or “energized.” Science itself, then, indicates that the universe must have had a beginning of some kind. So, what they’ve done is to come up with the idea of a “big bang” at some point in the past. We are not here to discuss the big bang, other than to point out that all this does is to back it up a bit. Nobody really believes that something comes from nothing. Even the big bang theory starts with something, doesn’t it? There was something that expanded or exploded in to more of something. The question then is: Where did that original little cluster of something come from? We know that something doesn’t come from nothing on its own, and we also know that the universe is not eternal.

As I see it, then, that is where we are left with the only real alternative, and that is: The universe (as an effect), must have had an adequate cause, and that cause is God. You might be thinking: But where did GOD come from? And I would say: God is not an effect. God is a cause.

I am reminded of Robinson Crusoe as he was stranded on the island thinking he was all alone. Of course, one day he went out and found a single human footprint on the beach. And that’s all it took! Based on that one footprint (the effect), he concluded that someone (the cause of the footprint) was on the island with him, that he was not alone, and that was a valid conclusion based on the law of cause and effect.

Of course, as I hinted earlier, many people come into this discussion having already made up their minds that God is not allowed, that no matter what conclusion they reach, God absolutely has to be excluded. From time to time, I will refer to the column in the Sunday newspaper by Marilyn Vos Savant, the woman on record as having the world’s highest IQ. Several years ago, someone wrote in with this question, “I assume that you, like most intellectual types, are not a religious person. So what do you think of the Big Bang theory?” This is her answer – she said, “I think that if it had been a religion that first maintained the notion that all the matter in the entire universe had once been contained in an area smaller than the point of a pin, scientists probably would have laughed at the idea.” Very interesting! And I think she is exactly right. As the author of Hebrews said, ***“Every house is built by someone.”*** Every effect must have an adequate cause, and the cause of this universe is God. That is one of the first reasons why I believe in God: God is the only sufficient cause for everything we see around us.

## II. **There is another reason why I personally believe in God, and it goes back to the idea that there is DESIGN in so many of the things we see around us.**

And the idea is: If it is clear that something has been designed, then it should also be clear that a designer has been involved. We think of the ramp on the front of this building. When we started getting estimates from the concrete people, they wanted a plan, a blueprint, a diagram. They said that it needed to be designed. So, we ended up going to two architects who designed it for us. The concrete contractors, then, didn’t just back the truck up and start unloading, but they built with purpose, based on a design. And when people drive by this building, it’s obvious that some thought went into that ramp. It was designed. I want us to notice something Paul said in Romans 1 (p. 1759). Again, we aren’t using this verse to prove that God exists (that would be circular reasoning), but I do want to point out that Paul is making an argument based on the world around us. Notice, please, Romans 1:20; speaking of God, Paul says, ***“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”*** In other words, we can know something about God, ***“through what has been made.”***

Dr. Michael Behe is a scientist who has done a lot of writing on the idea that there is design in the universe, and in one of Dr. Behe's books, he quotes Dr. Richard Dawkins, a rather well known evolutionary biologist. As a staunch evolutionist, Dr. Dawkins has said this, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." Very interesting! So, one of the leading evolutionists of our time clearly admits that the world around us has the appearance of having been designed for a purpose. In his book, Dr. Behe also quotes Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA. Dr. Crick says, "Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved." Again, very interesting! According to one of the leading scientists of our time, we see evidence all around us that God designed the earth and everything in it, but (in his words) we must constantly remind ourselves that there is no God!

When we look carefully, though, the admissions sometimes accidentally slip. I was listening to the radio on Friday morning as they were interviewing some scientist from one of our local hospitals, and I can't even remember the topic, but she said something about the human body being "designed" to work in a certain way. I was screaming at the radio, "Yes, we have been designed!" So, that's an example of a scientist accidentally letting it slip, admitting that there is evidence of design in the human body.

We see design all around us. Several years ago at camp, one of the professional naturalists at the reserve did a presentation on falcons, and all through that presentation, she kept talking about how a falcon's beak is "designed" for cutting, the tomial tooth is "designed" to rip it's prey's head off, the falcon's middle toe was "designed" to grab another bird out of the air, the falcon's head is "designed" to withstand 25 g's in a 240 MPH dive. Over and over again, she kept talking about how the falcon was "designed." I would agree: The falcon was "designed."

On our trip up to Alaska this summer, I was amazed by the humpback whales. They actually had a brand new statue right outside our hotel in Juneau, where we got on the ferry to come back south to Washington. By the way, this statue was designed, wasn't it? When we first posted a picture on social media, some of our friends thought that this was a real whale! "What a great shot," and so on. We were there overnight, though, so we posted another picture the next morning, and people started to figure out that this is a statue, not a real whale. But this statue was designed. I'm sure the artist had plans and a diagram and that he or she then went to the city council for approval, and then got funding based on the approved design, and so on. Are we to assume, then, that the statue is designed but that an actual whale that is infinitely more complex, was not designed? Nevertheless, all around the statue, they had these little displays about humpback whales - amazing facts! I had no idea that whales are able to focus on two different planes at once. The speculation is that they can focus above and below water at the same time. Their eyeballs actually change shape and retract inside the skull the lower they go in the water, so as not to collapse under the pressure. I learned that they fish using something known as a "bubble net." They team up with other whales and blow a large circle of bubbles under deep under water under their prey. As those bubbles rise to the surface, they expand, the circle tightens, smaller fish are trapped inside that shrinking circle, and a whale comes up and takes a huge gulp of fish. On the ferry, we saw dozens of these creatures breaching; that is, they were "jumping" completely out of the water. Absolutely amazing! I wanted to know why they did that, so when I got back here I realized that we have several young women here who are scientists. I saw two of these young women standing together talking to each other after a Bible class. I thought, "This is going to be fun," so I walk up and ask, "So, why do humpback whales leap out of the water?" They absolutely lit up, and they just exploded with theories. As I remember it, the leading theory was that it's fun! It is apparently fun to leap out of the water!

Well, this week, just for the fun of it, I thought I would look up "humpback whale design" online, and once I got past all of the whale tattoos, I started running into all kinds of research that's been done lately concerning

the bumps on the leading edge of a humpback whale's fins. These whales are roughly the size of a city bus, and yet they are amazingly agile. Well, in an article published in the *MIT Technology Review*, researchers at Harvard outlined their findings concerning the bumps on the leading edge of the flippers on humpback whales. I put a link to that article on the church's Facebook page. But these scientists developed a mathematical formula, they did testing in wind and water tunnels, and they found that those bumps allow the flipper to turn at a much sharper angle while avoiding the equivalent of "stall" in an airplane. As I understand it, a stall is what happens when a plane slows down to the point that lift is reduced, and the plane starts falling. The same thing can apparently happen to whales in the water. When they turn their flippers at such a sharp angle to make those turns and leaps, they should be slowing down. But, those bumps on the leading edge of their flippers keep that from happening. Now, researchers from the U.S. Naval Academy have jumped in, along with many others, and there is a rush to try to incorporate this "design" into airplanes, fighter jets, wind turbines, helicopter blades, ceiling fans, and even the fins on submarines. These bumps are what seem to allow these whales to do these acrobatics. Our most brilliant scientists are now mimicking a design from nature that came first by thousands of years.

Again, as we find in Hebrews, ***"Every house is built by someone, and the builder of all things is God."*** We look at the animal kingdom, therefore, from the human body, to falcons, and even to humpback whales, and we are reminded of the words of Job in Job 12:7-9, where Job says,

***But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you;  
And the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you.  
Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you;  
And let the fish of the sea declare to you.  
Who among all these does not know  
That the hand of the Lord has done this.***

We don't have time to go into design in our solar system or design in any number of other systems that God has created. But just in the animal kingdom, we clearly see the evidence of God's design. We see God's footprints all around us.

### **III. The third most basic reason for believing in God is simply 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 the survival of the fittest explain morality? It cannot.

Some people hear this argument, and they say, "Oh, you're saying that you can't live a moral life unless you believe in God." That's not what we're saying. We are saying that the existence of morality could not have evolved. This concept of right and wrong was given to us by God. It's something we do not see in the animal world.

We think of the black widow spider. Most of us know how the black widow gets 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 do their thing, she gets hungry, and she eats the first thing she sees, which is him! Now, if this were to happen between humans, we would have some serious issues, wouldn't we! There would be an investigation, we would have a trial, and there might be 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 do. Well, our argument is that this sense of "ought" and "ought not" comes from God.

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. 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. And that's why I've put Romans 2:14-15 up here. In that passage, Paul refers to "the law of the heart." Even without a written law, all people know that certain things are just wrong. This comes from God.

Someone might say: No, morality simply represents a set of standards that we agree on in a particular society. As a society, we just decide what is right and what is wrong, we vote on it, our government decides, or maybe the supreme court hands down a ruling, and that is where this concept of right and wrong comes from. But, we need to back that up just a little bit and remind ourselves what happened at the Nuremberg Trial at the end of World War II. Do you remember the Nazi's defense for those terrible things they did? Their defense, of course, was that they were simply following the laws of their nation, they were following the standard set by their society, they were just "following orders." 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.

### **Conclusion:**

This morning, then, we have looked at three of the main reasons why I believe God exists - the Law of Cause and Effect, Design Demands a Designer, and the Existence of Morality. I hope these thoughts have been somewhat helpful. And I hope you can be here next week as we look at several reasons for believing that the Bible is the word of God. I would encourage you to check out some of the brochures on this subject we have on the wall in the entryway, many of those from Apologetics Press. I would also encourage you to check out [www.apologeticspress.org](http://www.apologeticspress.org). There is also an article in the cubbyholes by a friend of mine who used to be an atheist who now preaches the gospel in Tennessee, and some of his thoughts on this subject.

Thankfully, most of us here this morning already believe in God. And that is a good step. That right there is huge. However, when it comes to learning what God did for us and when it comes to what we actually need to do, that is where we need the written word of God. The word tells us that God loved us so much that he sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from sin, by publicly stating our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the

forgiveness of our sins. If you would like to talk about it, please let us know. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can come to the front as we sing this next song...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)