



Intellectual Faith

An Apologetic Approach to Sharing the Gospel

By Michael Trutt

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Preface

"I am an intellectual." I used to wear that label with a sense of pride. I suppose I still do on some level, but now I see it for what it is. It is a gift from God that many other people have as well. It is not my identity, nor should it be. But it was.

I would try to wow people with my ability to reason about God, good and evil, Creation vs. Evolution, and so on. I was a Christian, but I was an intellectual first and a child of God second. That was wrong. I didn't realize it however.

When I would "witness" to people, I would discuss my *ability* to believe that Jesus died for my sins, but I would never tell my friend that Jesus died for his sins, too. I wasn't sharing the gospel. I wasn't witnessing. I was showing off. It was brain candy. God gave me a gift to understand things in a way that many others do not and I was simply using it for my own enjoyment. I wasn't right with God and didn't realize it, until someone pointed out 1 Corinthians 2:11a, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" I didn't understand the point at first. A careful reading of the verse revealed the operative word to be "spirit", as opposed to "mind". I was taken aback. It meant that when I felt dual minded, wanting to do things I knew were wrong for example, the thoughts from my spirit were my real thoughts, as opposed to the thoughts from my intellect. Paul reaffirmed this in Romans 7:21 when he wrote, "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good." The part of me that had always defined my identity had been my intellect, and scripture was saying that my intellect didn't really know me; the real me was my spirit.

When I went home, I thought about it and read 1 Corinthians 13:8 - 10, "...if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." In other words, the only reason spiritual gifts are necessary is because in our flesh, we cannot know everything; we can only know what God reveals to us through the abilities we have as humans. When Christ comes for us, and brings us to Heaven, we will no longer be limited by our humanity, but will still have our spirit, which will discern completely all there is for us to know. The brain I have will be gone. The intellect I use for expanding my knowledge will stop limiting my ability to grasp what my spirit already knows, because my spirit will be free.

It took me a while to re-orient my walk with God. I needed to stop living my life based on being smart. Friends and colleagues may differ on my success in this area, but I have begun living my life based on what my *spirit* tells me about God. I no longer discuss hypothetical topics with unsaved friends only to entertain myself, but I actually try using those times to witness to them instead. However, I must still meet them where they are at as Paul did in Acts 17:23, "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.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." Like Paul did here, "meeting people where they are at" often means engaging them in conversations of philosophy and basics such as whether God exists. The challenge is to hold these conversations in such a way that witnesses to our fellow conversationalists. As Paul showed Acts 17, it can mean engaging in apologetics as a means for sharing the gospel.

Engaging in apologetics is a fulfillment of 1 Peter 3:15, which tells us to be "ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you." Using reason to focus on the gospel is the only proper application of apologetics, because it is the gospel that gives one hope, not ones ability to engage in intellectual sparring.

If you use apologetics to prove that God exists, that God created the world, that the Bible is God's word, and that Jesus rose from the dead, you will not win any souls, because you are not offering your friend a relationship with God. For example, saying that life is difficult because of Original Sin¹ does not tell your friend that Jesus died for our sins². Showing evidence that Jesus rose from the dead³ does not tell someone that Jesus conquered death to show that He'd conquered our sin⁴. Showing evidence that scripture has been faithfully preserved until modern times does not convey the agape love God showed when He inspired the prophets to write down His Word⁵. Apologetics by itself does not save, and too many conversations stop at the proofs, before the Christian has had a chance to show what any of this has to do with the Gospel. I believe that unless your goal is to offer a relationship with God, your witnessing will be contrary to the example set by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1 - 5:

"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Based on this passage, I no longer seek to persuade, though I pray they be persuaded. Now, I seek to explain. I no longer try to prove anything about God or the accuracy of faith. Instead, I show how beginning with my faith, I have arrived at an understanding of God and the world that is self-consistent. I explain how this understanding will answer many or all of the questions an intellectual or skeptic may have, given the assumption that my faith is true. It provides me with opportunities to spread the gospel, as I let the Holy Spirit do His work on their hearts.

¹ Genesis 3:17 - "Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it"; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.' "

² Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

³ John 20:1 - "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb." If this were made up, then the choice of a woman to first find Jesus missing would have been ineffectual, because they had such a low status. To be a truly effective tale, the writer should have written that a man found Jesus' tomb empty.

⁴ Luke 24:26 - "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"

⁵ Revelation 22:7b - "Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

Introduction

"Because you have seen Me, have you believed?
Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Jesus Christ⁶

This book targets the intellectual. By using the term intellectual, I am not referring to a person's level of intelligence, but to an intelligent person with a particular personality type. Many intelligent people are not "intellectuals" in the respect that I mean. Intellectuals, as I will use the term, want everything proven and explained; they often feel foolish for accepting as fact something unproven. Such an attitude is contrary to scripture. When He was on Earth, Jesus said to have the faith of a child⁷. Children have the ability to accept the facts before them without having to understand. Intellectuals generally do not afford themselves that luxury. To them, faith seems foolish⁸. Such a person can never believe something that cannot be proven... unless the Holy Spirit intervenes. Therefore, while a believer cannot prove the Christian faith to an intellectual non-believer, he can show his faith to be consistent. This book will not help you prove the Gospel; it will help you create opportunities to explain it. As for proof, we leave that to the Holy Spirit.

God has proven His existence to me over and over. If you are a Christian, then surely He has proven His existence to you as well. What can be so frustrating to a Christian is when the truth seems so clear and obvious that we believe our testimony to be enough to convert any non-believer. With all other things being equal, I believe it would be enough. However, not all factors are equal. We have a God who gives each person a measure of faith⁹, but leaves it for us to decide what we will do with it. Satan on the other hand is always waiting to snatch away belief in whatever truth is revealed. The question is which way each person will be swayed¹⁰.

Intellectual types tend to be swayed away from God and feel very strongly about their choice because such people do not make their choices lightly. They believe they have good reason for their choice, and tend to remain steadfast in their conclusion, unless they are proven wrong. Similarly, intellectual Christians often have the strongest faith. Having allowed God's spirit to sway their beliefs toward Him, they can explain the world

⁶ John 20:29

⁷ Mark 10:15 - "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all."

⁸ John 20:25b - "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

⁹ Romans 12:3 - "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

¹⁰ Mark 4:14 - 20 - "The sower sows the word. And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and hundredfold."

in terms of their faith. Like the intellectual atheist, the intellectual Christian remains steadfast, and is rarely convinced by others' attempts to prove them wrong or foolish. The impetus for this book is the collection of experiences between intellectual believers, unbelievers, and myself.

By my experience, conversations between intellectual Christians and intellectual Atheists typically reduce to a discussion of faith. The Christian has faith while the Atheist does not¹¹. Usually, the conversation ends there. In my opinion, that is where the conversation needs to begin!

Arguments can only convince someone they are wrong when the conversationalists agree on their premises. Because the Christian has faith that God exists, the premises assumed by a Christian are different than those of an Atheist. If you do not acknowledge this at the outset of an argument about God or religion, then your discussion will only continue until your friend realizes that your premises are different. How can you break this pattern? If you know from the beginning that your premises are different, then you have the chance for a truly constructive discussion. The idea is to focus the interchange on your faith in God and Jesus.

Without intervention by the Holy Spirit, the contents of this book will not convince any Atheist that God exists or that Christianity is the only correct religion. For this reason, many Christians consider books such as this and the conversations described herein to be pointless and without fruit. "Don't reason with them," they will say, "Just preach the gospel." Well, they are partially correct. I would rephrase it slightly, "Don't try to convert intellectuals with reason. However, preach the gospel to them in whatever fashion they will receive it." By the experiences of this author, intellectual Atheists tend not to accept the gospel when you preach to them about fire and brimstone. Typically, they've heard it before, usually growing up, or from well-meaning Christians who sincerely don't want their friends or family members to end up in Hell. So, don't try to convince them or convert them. If someone is to be saved, God will do the saving. Remember that He did it with you.

Keep in mind that the Word never goes out void¹². As a Christian, you are only a vessel for God to use, and then only as He chooses¹³. Converting is not your responsibility; it's God's. However, spreading the gospel is your responsibility¹⁴. After all, a person cannot accept the gospel if he hasn't heard it. Therefore, how can we spread the gospel constructively to an intellectual? The answer is by sharing your faith. Don't try to prove God exists, but share your belief in God. Using this approach, they will listen to you, and they may even ask you questions. Why? Because you're starting with the common premise that "Christians have faith."

¹¹ This particular point may be open for debate. I discuss it more detail in Chapter 1.

¹² Isaiah 55:11 - "So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."

¹³ Isaiah 64:8b - "We are the clay, and Thou our potter; And all of us are the work of thy hand."

¹⁴ Mark 16:15b - "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

Consider how you would share your faith with an intellectual Atheist. One atheist recalled with amusement the following experience:

"A new Christian came to my door. Apparently he was trying to convert everyone he could to his new found faith. I started asking him questions, and he couldn't answer them. I ran circles around him. By the time he left, I almost had him in tears."

This just goes to show that it's easy to stump a new Christian. In fact, even mature Christians get flustered when confronted with intellectual phrases like "Occam's Razor" and the "Epicurean Argument"¹⁵. It is my hope that after reading this book, you will be equipped to answer such challenges so that the person challenging you will learn how reasonable your faith is. Don't be discouraged when your friend is not converted. Just remember that if God exists, then your faith is indeed reasonable; and this should be your point. The Holy Spirit will soften your friend's heart when He is ready (assuming your friend is willing to exercise his measure of faith), and your words will be remembered. God may even put it on your heart to lead your friend in The Sinner's Prayer one day; but it will be in His time, not yours.

Though any chapter could be taken alone, the book is intended to be read in sequence, because each chapter builds on the chapters before. Chapter 1 is a discussion of faith, what it is, how to talk about it, and how to use it in conversation. The rest of the book is based on the foundation laid on Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 discusses the flaws in several arguments used to "prove" that Christianity is true. It is my desire to discourage Christians from using these arguments, because using flawed arguments is a terrible witness, and only pushes potential converts further away from God. However, I do not believe that most Christians realize the flaws in what they are saying. The chapter does not refute Christianity; it shows why these arguments don't support Christianity.

Chapter 3 shows how to rebuke various Atheist objections against Christianity. Just as the Christian arguments in Chapter 2 don't prove Christianity is right, the arguments discussed in Chapter 3 don't prove it's wrong.

Chapter 4 discusses honest atheistic questions/objections that are geared toward making Christians think. Similar to the questions in Chapter 3 (which are designed to stump Christians), they are intended to be slam-dunk arguments that any "thinking man should realize". However, there are answers to these questions, and it shouldn't make Christians squirm to answer them.

Finally, Chapter 5 paints a picture of history and the world as it is, in a way that acknowledges the glorious truths that Christians embrace *and* the ugly truths that atheists use against us. I believe we Christians shy away from discussing unpleasant observations about life, in favor of talking only of God's love because it is pleasant. But, since God's truth is such a good explanation for how atheistic observations can exist amid the Gospel, I exhort you to embrace *all* truth as you go out and witness to your intellectual acquaintances and friends¹⁶.

Proceed in faith!

¹⁵ Both are discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁶ John 8:32 - "...and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Chapter 1: Is it Reasonable to Have Faith?

“As was explained... we could never be quite sure that we had indeed found the theory, since theories cannot be proved. But if the theory was mathematically consistent and always gave predictions that agreed with observations, we could be reasonably confident that it was the right one. It would bring to an end a long and glorious struggle to understand the universe.”¹

Stephen Hawking

Introduction

Having faith is reasonable. It's not only reasonable but it's necessary. Intellectuals have a hard time with faith however because they want everything to be proven. I would have a very hard time with the concept of faith if it weren't for the fact that I have it. This isn't as obvious as it seems. "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith¹⁷." In other words, faith is either belief through self-delusion or is a gift of knowledge given to us by God. Therefore, if you have the slightest inkling to believe in a God you have not proven scientifically, take it seriously because God is trying to talk to you.

Discussing faith with an intellectual

Why do intellectuals have a hard time with faith?

Faith to an intellectual seems more like self-delusion than it does knowledge of something real. After all, there is so much around us that we can explain, and we understand more every day. In fact, our level of knowledge grew so fast in the 20th century that it actually seems possible that we could understand the universe within the next century. Because of this perception, faith seems unnecessary in understanding the universe. In other words, *God* seems unnecessary as an explanation of the universe. Therefore, either God doesn't exist or He's not personal.

Suppose God didn't exist and yet here we are. What then must have been the motivation in creating the concept of God? One theory is that before the age of science, God was necessary for us to try explaining the universe. This is the intellectual view of *our faith* in God. It doesn't even let you get far enough to discuss the gospel, because it gets no further than the fact that *you have faith*. Your faith as a Christian gets lumped together with that of Jews, Mormons, and Muslims. From an intellectual point of view, there is no difference perceived.

¹⁷ Romans 12:3

<p>Compare these two conversations, noting in particular the italicized atheistic response. That shows where the presence or absence of your faith in the discussion determines either a friendly or hostile outcome.</p> <p>Have you ever had the discussion on the left? Your witness will be more effective if you your discussions are more like the on the right.</p>	
<p>Christian: God created the universe.</p> <p>Atheist: How do you know?</p> <p>C: Everything has a creator. Therefore, God is necessary to create the universe.</p> <p>A: Who created God?</p> <p>C: No one. He's always existed.</p> <p><i>A: If you can believe God always existed, then I can believe the universe always existed. It's the same thing.</i></p> <p>C: But, <fill in next argument></p> <p>A: Look, you have faith that God exists, and I don't. As long as that's true, we'll never agree. I'll see you later.</p>	<p>Christian: God created the universe.</p> <p>Atheist: How do you know?</p> <p>C: I believe by faith that God exists.</p> <p>A: I don't think He exists.</p> <p>C: But, if He does exist, then He must have created the universe.</p> <p>A: Well, who created God?</p> <p>C: No one. He's always existed.</p> <p><i>A: Well, since I don't believe in God, I believe the universe has always existed.</i></p> <p>C: Well, if God doesn't exist, then you're probably right. But, I'm not going to take that chance.</p>
<p>The conversation above ended as soon as the Christian's faith was brought into it. Both people were defensive, and the interchange ended with a disagreement and parting of ways.</p>	<p>This conversation established the Christian's faith as a premise of their discussion. No one was persuaded, but the conversation remained friendly, and ended with an agreement of what faith and a lack of faith each result in.</p>

Figure 1 - Ending with your faith vs. starting with your faith

Look at Figure 1 to see how this works in a conversation. Do you see the subtle difference between the two approaches? When you try to prove intellectually that God created the universe, you will appear like you are *looking for an explanation* of the universe, when you could easily explain the universe using arguments that *don't require* faith in God. Your conversation will go in circles, because your focus is not on how reasonable your faith is, but rather on *what is necessary* to explain the universe. Eventually, the atheist says, "Since you have faith and I don't, we'll never agree," and the conversation is over. Notice the bottom line: you are a Christian with faith that God created the universe! That shouldn't be the bottom line, because you and your intellectual friend knew this fact at the outset. Instead of being the conclusion of your conversation, it should have been the beginning! By letting it be the conclusion, the conversation will be over before you've spread the gospel. Start out with your faith, and there is at least a *chance* for you to share the gospel or some aspect of it.

Focusing the conversation on your faith

Start your conversations with the fact that you have faith, and proceed to show what must be true if your faith is true. If you're faith is true, then God created the universe. You don't have to prove it, and you're already further along than you would have been. Now you can proceed from there and explain that if your faith is true, then God exists, was first worshipped institutionally by the Hebrews (later the Jews), then adopted by the Christians when He gave the world Jesus to save us sinners from our sins. Progression to the Gospel is more natural, because that's exactly where our faith leads us every day.

If you choose to engage in intellectual conversation and never manage to reveal the gospel to your fellow conversationalist, then I would suggest that what you are doing is engaging in mind candy, and not real witnessing. I say this guardedly because I cannot truly say how God intends to use you; you may be saying exactly what He wants that person to hear. However, I can speak from my own experience. When I wasn't trying to steer the conversation over to the gospel, I don't believe I was being an effective witness, because telling someone I have faith doesn't reveal to him God's plan for his life (i.e., that he repent for his sins and live for Jesus).

Naturally, the conversation will go on to topics such as the existence of good and evil, free will, the nature of the universe, spirituality, and other such topics, and you may well enjoy it. Don't let me discourage you. In fact we will deal in later chapters with how one can proceed in such conversations without losing sight of the Gospel. Just maintain as your primary focus that God wants this person to know how much He loves us all¹⁸.

<i>Trying to prove that God exists is futile. However, explaining the ramifications of your faith in God is constructive.</i>	
<i>Instead of seeking to prove...</i>	<i>Seek to explain...</i>
Because the Jews are still around, therefore God exists.	If God exists, then of course the Jews are still around.
Because the universe exists, it must have been created by God.	If God exists, then He must of created the universe.
If the order in a watch proves it had a creator, then order in the universe proves that the universe had a creator.	If God exists and created the universe, it would explain why the universe is ordered.
Because we seek morality, it proves that God exists.	If God exists, then He wants us to live morally.
Statements like these cause arguments, and only prove that you have faith, something both parties knew from the beginning.	Statements like these don't prove anything, but do show that you know how to apply your faith in a reasonable manner.

Figure 2 - The difference between proving and explaining

As you enjoy discussing these other philosophical topics, having made your faith a premise of your dialog, you will not have to prove your faith is true¹⁹. You need only show what must be true given your faith, and you'll be amazed at how easy it can be to deflect arguments that attempt to debunk the truth that God has written on your heart²⁰. Look at Figure 2. As you can see, you do not have to prove that the existence of the Jews proves God's existence²¹. However, you can say that because of your faith, it makes sense that the Jewish people are still around despite everything the world has done to

¹⁸ John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

¹⁹ You could choose to prove that what you have is faith and not self-delusion. Such conversations are frequently without fruit, but I will cover one form of this conversation later in the book. Again the goal will not be to prove, but to explain that your faith is reasonable, whether it be self-delusion or not.

²⁰ Romans 2:15 - "...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..."

²¹ The existence of the Jews *does mean* that God exists, but you don't have to prove it.

them. After all, they are God's Chosen People. You're not trying to prove any truths; you are simply explaining how your faith is consistent with the state of the world.

How can you convince someone to have faith?

You cannot convince someone to have faith, and it's not your responsibility to try. Remember Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." All you need to do is reveal the word of God, and faith will come to the listener. However, the faith will be from God, and it will then be up to that person what they do with it. Frequently when the word goes out to an intellectual, the word falls onto the wayside as Satan "takes away the word that was sown in their hearts."²² That's not your fault, and you should not feel guilty for it. Just be faithful and true to God when you witness, and God's will will be done.

What is Faith?

Definitions of Faith

Notice that I didn't start this chapter with a definition of faith. However, because everyone has their own definition of faith, what we've seen so far is probably true regardless of your definition. However, a working definition of faith is necessary for witnessing to an intellectual, or else your conversation can end up going around in circles.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Most intellectuals do not believe that their hope for God is evidence of God. They believe it is mere fantasy. Many even say that our faith is a crutch because we are not strong enough to simply accept life as it comes. They say we invent some purpose for life's sufferings, instead of just getting through it. However, as we know, the faith we have comes from God. Accept the faith or don't, but there it is.

Webster's College Dictionary includes the following definitions for faith: "belief that is not based on proof" and "belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion." It is important that you understand which definition you are using, because you will go in circles otherwise. If an intellectual says he has no faith, he is not denying that he accepts things without proof. After all, there may be no proof that Santa Claus doesn't exist, but I'm sure he believes it. Intellectuals who "have no faith" are saying that they have no belief in God. However, Hebrews 11:1 does not limit faith to belief in God. Therefore, by this Biblical definition, he does have faith. He simply has faith about different things than you.

The fact that we all have faith is a very sticky point between intellectual atheists and Christians. If faith is simply "belief in God" then unbelievers don't have faith. It does no good to argue because by his definition, he's right.

²² Mark 4:15

<i>Source</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Application</i>
Hebrews 11:1	The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.	This type of faith is from God. Only theists <i>knowingly</i> have this faith. Atheists do have it, but they think it's their imagination.
Webster's	Belief that is not based on proof.	Theists and atheists both have this kind of faith. However, most atheists don't use this definition.
Webster's	Belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion.	Only Theists have this kind of faith. An atheist who says he has no faith is using this definition.
Agree on your definition of faith! No atheist uses the first definition (or else he wouldn't be an atheist!). Some atheists use the second definition. Most atheists use the third definition. All three definitions apply to Christians.		

Figure 3 - Which definition of faith will you use?

Discussing Faith

Suppose you tell your friend he has faith that God doesn't exist. If your friend views faith as a Christian's tool to explain the universe, then he will say that he needs no faith to explain the universe; he needs faith in neither God's existence nor God's non-existence. To him, God and faith are non-issues.

Based on the second definition of faith in Figure 3, it takes faith to believe that the universe was or was not created. It is possible not to have an opinion, but even this position is taken in faith, because it assumes one can ignore the truth, a false assumption that will lead to eternal damnation. Therefore, the intellectual atheist has a belief system rooted in faith, whether he means to or not, but only by your definition of faith, not his.

If you attempt to prove to an atheist that he has faith, he may think you're trying to ascribe a religious significance to his lack of belief, when he has no religious intent at all. He is simply being scientific in his approach toward understanding the universe. Now, suppose you said, "But you can't prove that." He would probably agree with you. But if you said, "You have faith in that," he would disagree because his opinion is not religious. Therefore, arguing that your friend has faith is entirely unnecessary, because the only issue is that you never agreed on what definition you would *both* use.

Suppose your friend agrees to use our second definition of faith. You can proceed to discuss with him the difference between your choices²³. That is, you have faith in God; he has faith that it's unimportant. Point out to him why he's wrong (as he'll surely do with you). Tell him the gospel. Don't be afraid to say he's going to Hell for his impartiality, as long as you don't be a jerk about it. When you talk about Hell, your attitude is that you're just giving him the facts. Don't worry about scaring him either. If you scare him, then good. If you don't scare him, then don't try. Just give him the gospel. Once you do that, and he's engaged you long enough to hear it, then you're done. Only engage him for as long as he's willing. Feel out his interest in accepting Jesus if it

²³ If you want, agree to use the third definition of faith. However, as you proceed, you will need to refer to "belief without proof" in place of the word faith. Remember that by agreeing to this definition of faith, you are agreeing that he doesn't have any.

seems appropriate. However, once he ends the conversation or changes the subject, let him, and feel good that God used you to spread the gospel to this person. Your civility and respect may allow you the luxury of discussing the gospel with him again some time.

Faith is a source of knowledge

No matter what definition of faith you agree to, it is very likely that you will disagree on one very important point: You accept your faith as knowledge. He will probably consider your faith to be either ignorance or self-delusion. The issue is how to gain knowledge of truths that cannot be proven. If proof is not forthcoming, then faith is the only other option. Here is what William James wrote regarding the matter...

“Believe truth! Shun error! —these, we see, are two materially different laws; and by choosing between them we may end by coloring differently our whole intellectual life. We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance. Clifford... exhorts us to the latter course... You, on the other hand, may think that the risk of being in error is a very small matter when compared with the blessings of real knowledge.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Indeed I do consider “the risk of being in error a very small matter compared with the blessing of real knowledge.” The reason is because I’m so sure I’m right, so where’s the risk? Your skeptical friend however will not consider anything knowledge if it is based on faith. It seems foolish to him, or at the very least uncertain. After all, common sense dictates that nothing uncertain can be considered true knowledge, right? You will undoubtedly encounter this challenge, even if it’s unspoken.

You are going to find that unbelievers are amazed that you consider your faith a source of knowledge. It may seem tempting to argue with them over whether faith can produce knowledge or not. However, that is not the issue. I explain to people that since I believe God exists, I must live as though He exists. I don’t have to prove to them that my faith is accurate or correct. However, not acting on it would make me either a hypocrite or fool, and I choose to be neither. My friend might say that I’m no hypocrite, but that I’m still a fool. So, we disagree on something.

To a skeptic, the mere fact that you use faith as a means of acquiring knowledge calls the very concept of faith into question. After all, if God doesn’t exist, then how can you possibly call your faith knowledge? Even you would agree that faith in something nonexistent is not a proper source of knowledge. Since you cannot prove that God exists, the reasoning goes, faith is not equivalent to knowledge. The problem is that this objection to faith is not a proof against it, because he had to assume faith was invalid in order to make his objection. His explanation could go something like this:

Man created monotheism independent of any actual god. Simply, people perceived a need for a god, and so subconsciously made one up. Over time, their religion evolved into what it is today: a religion that considers faith knowledge, because it has to if it’s going to survive.

Notice that to show why people have faith, an argument has to be made that is totally devoid of faith. Such an argument is not proof; the non-validity of faith must have been an assumption. For you on the other hand, your faith is a given. Imaginary or not, it’s there. Therefore, you can assume that God had a plan, and that He very meticulously put it into place. Part of that plan includes revealing Himself to you in personal ways that you cannot prove scientifically. Certainly, you must accept this as knowledge if it came from God. Explain it to your friend like this:

If my faith is a given, what am I supposed to do? Act like it's false? Of course not! Just as you proceed without proof that God's nature doesn't matter, I must proceed as though my faith is from Him, and is therefore knowledge.

Our explanation for why faith is valid is not a proof; it is an explanation. That is why it is important to avoid the mentality of somebody proving truth. Determine that you can only *explain* truth. Such reasoning will not sway an atheist and cause him to have faith. However, the logic gives you openings for explaining the gospel, which is the goal of witnessing.

Why Faith in God is more reasonable than faith in Santa Claus

One common objection to faith in God is that believing in God is no more reasonable than believing in Santa Claus. Well, if it turns out that God exists and Santa Claus doesn't, then I'd say believing in God is much more reasonable than believing in Santa Claus. If your friend disagrees with this statement, then he is basically saying that believing something true is not reasonable unless you can prove that it's true.

Recall that you both knew about that difference in philosophy at the beginning of the conversation, because you started out by declaring your faith is a given. Hence, you don't need to argue about this. Just remind him that he wouldn't respect you if you didn't proceed according to your beliefs. It just so happens that you believe in God, and not in Santa Claus.

Another explanation you can offer regarding why you believe in God and not Santa Claus is that if God exists and has revealed Himself in your heart, then you didn't simply choose to believe in God. What you actually chose was to accept the knowledge God revealed to you. As for Santa Claus, he's made no such attempt that you are aware of to give you knowledge of him. Therefore, it is reasonable that you believe in God and not in Santa Claus²⁴.

One man's proof is another man's faith

I'm sure there are events in your walk with God that should amaze any unbeliever enough to become a believer. It's not like a mathematical proof but it seems like it should be quite persuasive. So, you share it, and the person you tell is not persuaded. What happened? Mark 4:15 is what happened. When Jesus explained the parable of the four types of soil, he said in Mark 4:14 – 15, "The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts." It's amazing whenever I see it happen, but that's what's happening.

Here's an example. When I was single, I wanted to be married very much. I described to God exactly the kind of woman I thought would be able to accept me for who I am and make me very happy. I described her features, her body, and her ethnic background. I swear to you that I even described to God what some of her family dynamics would be and described family members that I thought would be necessary for her to be "the one". I then gave my search for her over to God and stopped pursuing women to date. Over a year later, an older woman set me up with the woman who was to be my wife. I'd never met her before. Her physical features fit the profile I'd described in my prayers, but I didn't give it much thought. Then, on our second date, she started talking about her

²⁴ A more thorough discussion of "belief in Santa Claus" can be found in Chapter 3.

family. As she did, I got the strangest chill up and down my entire body as she described to me the family I'd described to God. I was speechless, because there she was... the woman I'd described to God in my prayers, sitting across the table from me. I thought I'd made her up, yet there she was. Our courtship was the easiest experience of my life. The rest is history. If this isn't enough to convince people that God exists, consider the fact that I left out a lot of details that only make the story even more miraculous.

I describe the meeting of my wife to Christians, and they sit back in awe of our Lord. This is truly proof to me and other Christians of God's existence and power. However, I tell this tale to atheists and I get one of several responses. "I can't explain it, but it doesn't prove God exists." "Well, I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe there could be something beyond ourselves which joins us all together." "Coincidence" "Everything seems pre-ordained when you look back on it." This last one is my favorite because the statement is meant as proof that nothing is pre-ordained; the statement is actually proof that God's hand is in everything.

The difference between your faith and his

In all of your conversations with your intellectual friends, keep in mind that there is a difference between your faith and his, even if he agrees to your definition of faith. The difference is that your faith comes from God; his faith does not come from God. You have faith in God because He's revealed Himself to you in some meaningful personal way that was probably beyond your control. If God didn't give me faith in Him, I don't think I'd be open to receiving it. My friends who either believe God does not exist or believe it doesn't matter have not gotten their belief from God. Their faith is simply belief without proof. They perceive their faith as a rational and logical conclusion, and so they have trouble relating to me. If they're being rational and logical, and everyone else who is rational and logical agrees with them, then I must be being irrational and illogical. Therefore, they want me to prove that I'm right. However, I no longer bite. I still engage them in conversations, but I now explain my faith instead of proving its truth. I defend my actions assuming my faith is a given. However, my faith does not get proven. I point the conversation at the gospel, showing the consistency of the actions that result from my faith, and I let God take it from there.

I have several intellectual friends who haven't come to know the Lord. I used to think it was a poor reflection on my ability to witness, and perhaps it is. However, I no longer think so, because ever since I've started giving these friends opportunities to exercise faith in God, none have taken the step. Not a single one has agreed to pray, or even go to church. The thought scares them. There is something keeping them from God that I can't quite understand, except in the context of Mark 4:15.

Your faith is reasonable. Though you cannot prove it to an atheist's satisfaction, you can explain it. Make sure you agree on the definition of faith you are going to use, trying to get him to use our second definition. Do not seek to prove any truths. Simply remind your friend that because your faith is a given, what you believe naturally falls from it, and you would be a hypocrite to advocate anything else.

Chapter 2: Common Arguments That Don't Prove Your Faith

"There is the music from Johann Sebastian Bach.
Therefore, there must be a God." ⁱⁱⁱ

Introduction - The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer (Proverbs 15:28a)

Following are several arguments I have heard from Christian friends and read in Christian literature. As arguments to convince an atheist, I consider them flawed, even when I agree with the conclusions. Some are flawed because there are alternative secular theories that allow anyone to believe what he or she wants regardless of what you say. Others are not logically sound; they could be downright false. In every case, your acceptance of these arguments reflects your faith, not your ability to reason. Therefore, I recommend refraining from these arguments as a tool for proving your faith true. However, some may still be useful for *explaining* your *reasonable* view of the world to an intellectual who has *accepted your faith as a given*.

As you discuss these topics with intellectual atheists, there is a very important concept to consider: the concept of what is "*necessary*" to explain the universe. We touched on it in Chapter 1, and it contributes a great deal to the rejection of God as the creator of everything. The theory can be described as follows:

God is merely a catchall argument used by theists to explain the unexplainable. However, consider that mankind understands far more today than we could 3,000 years ago²⁵. We know the earth is round and that it's not the center of the universe. We understand the Theory of Relativity, and have gained ground in the study of Quantum Mechanics. We know how babies develop, and generally understand where disease comes from. In past times, all of this was considered unknown, and was explained in terms of God. With the mystery of the universe unraveling so fast, it's only a matter of time before we understand the entire universe. When that happens, God will no longer be a *necessary* tool for explaining things, because all will be explainable without Him.

Interestingly, this view is practically part of Christian doctrine. God, through the Holy Spirit, gives us knowledge in this world that we cannot derive without His help. But, one day, we *will* know everything, and the *Holy Spirit* will no longer be necessary for explaining things²⁶. But here's the catch: we will be dead, and in God's presence at the time.

As you start to understand the intellectual atheists' view of your faith, you should acknowledge that atheists make a good point. There are many people who believe in God for exactly the reasons we are accused: they're weak-minded or naïve. I say this with hesitation, because I don't think Christians are generally weak-minded or naïve. However, the church did continue teaching that the earth was the center of the universe after being given proof to the contrary. When science absolutely proves something, it should never be a blow to our faith. When it is, then we have made the atheist's point for him, because we *are* being weak-minded *and* naïve. God is not merely an explanation; He is the divine Creator who loves us all and wants us to understand Him and His work.

²⁵ When Moses started writing the Bible.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:9 - 10 - "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." In other words, the Holy Spirit gives us incomplete insight into God; but when Jesus brings us into the Father's presence, our insight will be complete, and the Holy Spirit's job on Earth will be done.

Here is how I respond when someone tells me that they don't believe in God because the concept of God is unnecessary to explain the universe:

I agree that, miracles notwithstanding, the universe can be explained logically without invoking God. But, should it turn out that God created the universe and sent Jesus to die for our sins, then it is absolutely *necessary* to explain the universe in terms of God. The fact that we *can* explain the universe without invoking God simply means we understand God's design.

This is not a proof by design argument, but an application of common sense. Consider the intricacies of a watch. To conclude that the watch had no creator because you have figured out how the watch works is absurd. Yet our ability to understand the universe is often used to conclude that the universe had no creator - that the creator is *unnecessary*.

Because our faith is a given, we are in a unique position to explain the universe in terms of God. For us, God is not the conclusion, but the premise. We talk of God creating the universe because we're trying to figure out how God did it. Since God is the premise in our lives, he should also be the premise in our discussions with atheists. God will prove His existence to your friend when the time is right.

Second Law of Thermodynamics

The Second Law of Thermodynamics is a physical law that is frequently used as proof that Evolution violates the laws of physics. The argument is appealing because Evolution appears to contradict the universal tendency of order to lead to disorder, leading theists to conclude that Evolution is impossible, and thus God must exist. The problem is that Evolution does *not* violate the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Hence, the argument fails to demonstrate that God is a *necessary* factor in creating mankind.

What is the Second Law of Thermodynamics?

The simplest definition of the Second Law of Thermodynamics is that the universe must proceed from a state of order to a state of disorder^{iv}. In other words, once order is lost, it is irrecoverable. Similar formulations of this law have been constructed in terms of heat^v, useable energy^{vi}, and information^{vii}. The concept at work is called "entropy". As order, heat, energy, or information is *lost* by a closed system, *entropy* is said to have *increased*. The amount of the loss is the measurement of the entropy. Therefore, the general concept of the Second Law of Thermodynamics is that a closed system will always experience an *increase* in entropy over time.

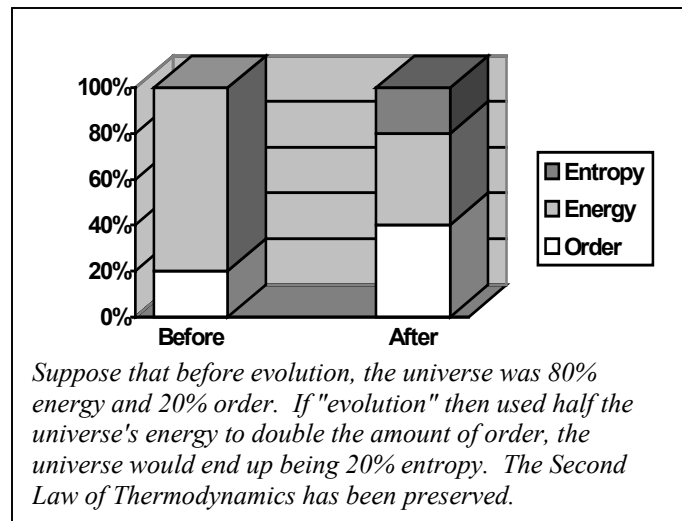
To illustrate the Second Law of Thermodynamics in its various forms, consider a logic circuit within a computer chip. Suppose the logic circuit could have one of two values, either 0 or 1. If the electricity is going clockwise within the circuit, the value is 1; counterclockwise is zero. Before an actual value is recorded in this "bit", it is in a disordered state, having equal probabilities for a reading of 0 or 1. After the logic circuit is given a value, "it will definitely be in one state or the other. So the memory has passed from a disordered state to an ordered one." This would seem contrary to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. "However, in order to make sure that the memory is in the right state, it is necessary to use a certain amount of energy... This energy is dissipated as heat, increasing the amount of disorder in the universe. One can show that this increase in disorder is always greater than the increase in the order of the memory itself. Thus the heat expelled by the computer's cooling fan means that when a computer records an item in memory, the total amount of disorder in the universe still goes up."^{viii}

Energy can be transferred many times before it is rendered useless. But, as the amount of useable energy goes up in the universe, the universe has less energy to maintain its appearance of order. Therefore, loss of energy means loss of order²⁷. So, when you observe an *apparent increase* of order (such as a computer setting a value in its memory), you are actually observing an expenditure of energy that constitutes a *net decrease* of order within the universe. In fact, the Second Law of Thermodynamics would allow the order of the universe to continually increase, even beyond our comprehension, as long there is a constant loss of useable energy, but still enough useable energy left to support the effort. When the universe reaches the point where there is no more energy to run on, all of the order we have witnessed will break down, until all matter has been transformed into energy and then used up. Until then, computers will continue to work, houses will continue to be built, and life will continue to evolve²⁸.

Figure 4 - Affects of Evolution on Entropy

Using the Second Law of Thermodynamics to Disprove Evolution

When I hear the Second Law of Thermodynamics used by fellow Christians to disprove Evolution, the argument always defines entropy in terms of orderliness. As the argument goes, since Evolution would be a natural increase in order, it must not have happened, because the resultant decrease in entropy would violate the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This sounds persuasive on the surface. However, as we see in Figure 4, order within the universe *can* increase, because of the corresponding loss of energy. In



other words, Evolution does *not* violate the Second Law of Thermodynamics, because the amount of energy necessary to support Evolution would be so large that the net change in the universe's entropy would be *positive*. As long as the overall change in entropy is *positive*, there can be *negative* changes in entropy here and there. This means that evolution would not violate the Second Law of Thermodynamics as long as any given evolutionary advance was accompanied by a large enough loss of energy.

²⁷ See Figure 4.

²⁸ Theologians generally agree that evolution within a species (i.e., micro-evolution) does occur, especially since scientists have witnessed it. It's macro-evolution (the evolving of one species into another) that is disputed.

Increases in Order Are Caused By God

Theologically, it would be awesome if we could say that Evolution violates the laws of physics. However, the fact that we can't does not need to be a problem when we witness.

If you believe that a discussion about Evolution may be an appropriate tool for witnessing to a friend, don't talk about the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Instead, simply frame your conversation in terms of changes in order within a closed system over time. Discuss a real *man-made* closed system (such as a car), and explore with your friend the results of leaving the system alone. Let him pick the system if it will keep the conversation friendly. What you will find is that order tends to decrease when the system is left alone. For example, a new car left sitting for 5 years might not start right away. Next, explore the practical requirements for maintaining orderliness within the system and then creating more order within the system. What you will find is that a person will be required somehow. Perhaps someone will be required to interfere in the system periodically (e.g., a mechanic). Maybe the person who designed the system would have to design it to be self-maintaining, requiring intelligence in the design. Of course, even then, a person might *still* be required to *maintain* the mechanics that *maintain* the system. Whatever the solution, you are unlikely to avoid a decrease in order without some eventual interference.

Most intellectuals will know where you're going with this. Therefore, it is important that you make the right point. If your point is that God created the universe just like a person must create the hypothetical system you just discussed, then the response will be that you haven't proven it. Well, they'd be right. You haven't proven that God created life or the universe. However, what you have shown is that it is reasonable to believe it, and you must make *that* your point, or else the conversation will be over with no fruit to show.

Recall from Chapter 1 that your faith must be a *given* in the conversation, or it will be the *conclusion* of your conversation. We can see how that works here. If you've remembered to establish your faith as a given, then your friend will agree that you are reasonable for concluding that God created the universe. After all, you have faith, so naturally your argument will support it. He'll still think you're wrong, but he'll agree that you're being reasonable.

The point I try to make to my intellectual and atheist friends is that because I have faith in God, and because I see ordered life forms on the Earth, it is therefore reasonable for me to see consistency between these two facts. I point out to them that if I'm right about God, then the existence of life is a reasonable outcome. At the very least, it is reasonable for me to perceive life as something from God.

This line of reasoning does not disprove Evolution. Our argument is consistent with both Theistic Evolution (i.e., Evolution driven by God) and Creationism (i.e., God created the universe, Earth, and man, in 6 days). The reason we cannot disprove Evolution is because our omnipotent God could have created mankind via Evolution if He chose to. On the other hand, Creationism is a very reasonable interpretation of scripture²⁹ as well.

²⁹ We will explore this topic further in Chapter 4.

Whatever method God chose, even an atheist will agree that if God exists, it would account for the existence of life and the order observed in the universe.

“The Cosmological Argument”

The argument explored above is that man-made systems have degenerative qualities that require the existence of people to maintain them. For example, a car requires a person to fill the gas tank and perform tune-ups. Furthermore, the fact that the car exists is evidence of the person (or people) who created it. Therefore, if God exists and created the universe, then the existence of the universe is evidence of the God who created it. So, by noticing that human creations imply humans, and that cosmic creations imply God, and then realizing that this essentially covers everything that exists in the universe, many Christians have concluded that mere existence implies creation and a creator. This brings us to our next argument that many Christians use, the "Cosmological Argument".

If it exists was it created?

One area where atheists and theists agree is that if we try to trace back the cause of everything, then everything will probably trace back to a single entity that had no cause. As Christians, we can agree with scientists that everything within the universe traces back to the universe itself. That's kind of obvious. The question is whether the universe in turn traces back to God.

Let's suppose that God really was an invention of mankind to explain the unexplainable, but that everything could be explained without invoking God, everything except for the actual existence of the universe. The intellectual atheist will acknowledge that we can't explain why the universe exists. But, to invent God as the cause of the universe simply begs the question, because now we can't explain why God exists. To the unbeliever, adding God to the mix doesn't solve the problem; the ultimate reason for everything has simply been shielded by a concept called God, who is unexplainable by definition. So, given the choice between an unexplainable universe vs. an unexplainable God, going with the unexplainable universe is more manageable. At least this way, we allow ourselves the possibility of figuring out the ultimate cause of our existence. To many intellectuals, shielding ourselves with "God" is like admitting defeat in our quest for the truth. So, when a Christian uses the Cosmological Argument by pointing to the mere existence of the universe as proof that God exists, it is not proof of God's existence to the intellectual atheist. Therefore, when choosing between God and universe as the initial cause of everything, our choice of God is a result of our faith, not our logic. As usual, this will typically conclude your conversation.

God Created the Universe

If your faith in God is the premise of the conversation, then you *can* discuss creation in a constructive fashion. Given that you believe God exists and sent Jesus to die for your sins, then it's reasonable for you to believe that He created the universe. Then, since God created the universe, its existence is *evidence* of God's existence. You haven't proven that God exists, or that He created the universe. However, should it turn out your faith is accurate, your conclusions are the reasonable outcome. Once again, when approached this way, your friend will likely agree with the conclusion that you're being reasonable, given your faith.

The Argument of Intelligent Design

Many Christians take a step back from the previous argument. Instead of arguing that *mere* existence is proof of God, they look at various *features* of existence and argue how each *feature* must be proof that God exists. In my opinion, you can view these as variations of the more general argument based on intelligent design. Here are several examples, paraphrased from the “Handbook of Christian Apologetics”:

- **The Argument from Change** – Because **we change**, and such change is caused by something outside ourselves, then the fact the universe changes must be caused by something outside the universe.
- **The Argument from Efficient Causality** – Because **we cause other things to be**, and other things cause us to be, then something must have caused the universe to be.
- **The Argument from Time and Contingency** – Because **we did not have to exist but do**, then something outside us must have determined that we would exist. Therefore, because the universe did not have to exist, then something outside the universe must have determined that it would exist. Furthermore, this determinant would be something that *must* exist.
- **The Argument from Degrees of Perfection** – Because **we judge some things as being better than others** are, there must therefore be some ultimate best thing that exists, a standard by which everything else can be compared.
- **The Argument from Contingency** – Because **we have what it takes to exist**, and we get “what it takes” from the universe, and the universe has what it takes to exist, then the universe must get “what it takes” from something outside the universe.
- **The Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole** – Because of **our ability to interact with things outside ourselves**, our own existence cannot explain itself. Therefore, this must be true of all we interact with as well. Therefore, the existence of everything within the universe is insufficient to explain the existence of anything within the universe. Therefore, something outside universe must be necessary to explain it all.
- **The Argument from Consciousness** – Because **we find the universe intelligible**, then the intelligibility of the universe combined with our intelligence to understand it must be a result of some external intelligence and not blind chance.
- **The Argument from Truth** – Because **we can only know the world through ideas** and ideas are only in our minds, and because no single person can have every idea about the universe in his own mind, there must therefore be some ultimate mind outside the universe where all ideas can be known.
- **The Moral Argument** – Because **we are moral**, there must be an absolute morality. However, atheism is incompatible with the concept of *absolute* morality. Therefore it is wrong, and God exists as the ultimate source of morality.

- **The Argument from Desire** – Because **we have desires**, and creatures in nature only desire that which exists (i.e., food, water, sleep, sex), then the fact we [people] desire something beyond this world means that something beyond this world must exist, and must have created us with the desire to know Him.

Intellectuals do not accept these arguments as proof of God's existence, because intellectuals do not believe that God is *necessary* to explain the observations above. They argue that intelligence came about as just one more tool for survival, and that one result of intelligence has been self-awareness. Through self-awareness, we created the concept of morality, yet one more tool for survival. Through intelligence and self-awareness, combined with desire, we obtained the ability for abstract thought, resulting in the ability to desire things that don't exist; such desires are not for survival, but are mere side effects of the intelligence, self-awareness, and morality that did arise for the purpose of survival. Therefore, by framing everything in terms of Darwinism it seems no less plausible for the universe to be the root cause of all we observe than for God.

Similar to the arguments we've discussed already, the conclusion that God exists is true. However, while we can't use these particular arguments as proofs to an atheist, we can use them as explanations of why things are the way they are. In other words, if our faith is correct, then we *should* believe that God created the universe. Since He created the universe, He is the ultimate source of change, the ultimate cause, the thing that must exist, the one "best thing" for all others to be compared to, our source of existence, the explanation of our ability to interact, the one mind that knows all ideas, the original source of absolute morality, and the cause of our desire to know Him. If our faith is true, and God exists, then humanity and the universe were *designed* by Him to work as we observe.

Time must have started

Consider how the "Argument for Intelligent Design" concludes that the universe had a beginning. That argument is based in philosophy. It concludes that the universe could only have a particular feature (e.g., change, morality, etc.) if something outside the universe created it to have that feature. But, what if we could prove *physically* that the universe had a beginning?

Earlier we discussed how Christians incorrectly use the Second Law of Thermodynamics to demonstrate how atheistic views violate the laws of physics. Another flawed attempt at using physics to debunk atheism is the theory that time began. Consider the following argument:

Science has proven that time is just a dimension of the universe, which means that time "began" when the universe did. This implies the universe must not have existed *before* time began, because there was no "before". So, something *outside* the universe must have caused it all to start. Therefore, God must exist.

I thought it was a slam-dunk argument when I first read it. Then I found out that while the past is indeed finite, it doesn't prove the universe was created.

Why Time Didn't Begin

Whether or not God created the universe with the Big Bang, we must consider how the theory impacts discussions of time if we're going to discuss Creation with an intellectual atheist who is well-versed in scientific theories.

According to the Big Bang theory, space and time simultaneously exploded outward from a single point, and history was on its way. It seems like a simple theory. However, we must consider that the mass of the entire universe was originally concentrated into that single point. With the volume of the entire universe approaching a size of zero, the gravity would be so crushing that Relativity would prevent time and space from working as we personally experience it. Furthermore, the volume would be so small that Quantum Mechanics would take over, introducing uncertainty into the first moment of the universe. These facts cause the beginning of time to be sort of *fuzzy*.

The Affects of Gravity on the Beginning of Time

To overly simplify the Theory of Relativity, the rate at which time passes can be *formulated* as a function of gravity: the greater the gravity, the slower time passes. For example, suppose you sent your friend on a rocket ship to Pluto and back. Let's also suppose that he traveled at almost the speed of light, just to save time. From his point of view, the trip might take, say, 15 minutes. Well, from your point of view, you'll wait for your friend for decades or even centuries, if you could live that long. Why? Because according to Relativity, traveling at velocities approaching the speed of light will increase your friend's mass from your perspective, resulting in higher gravity. Since time passes more slowly for masses of higher gravity, your friend's time frame will be so slow compared to yours that you will be very old (if not dead) by the time he arrives back on earth. But, what does this have to do with the beginning of the universe?

It's been proven that the universe is expanding. Using the laws of physics to project the universe back in time to the beginning of its expansion predicts that the universe's entire mass was concentrated into an infinitely small point, resulting in essentially infinite gravity at that point. With essentially infinite gravity, time at that point passed infinitely slow.

At that point within the universe, the first second took only a second. You would have to observe the big bang from *outside* the universe to notice that time was slower as you looked closer and closer toward its beginning. However, to take this to its logical conclusion, you would have to say that the universe started as an infinite mass with infinite gravity, concentrated in a volume of zero where time didn't pass at all. If time began, this oxymoronic point would be a description of the universe at its beginning. Let's call this beginning "Moment Zero".

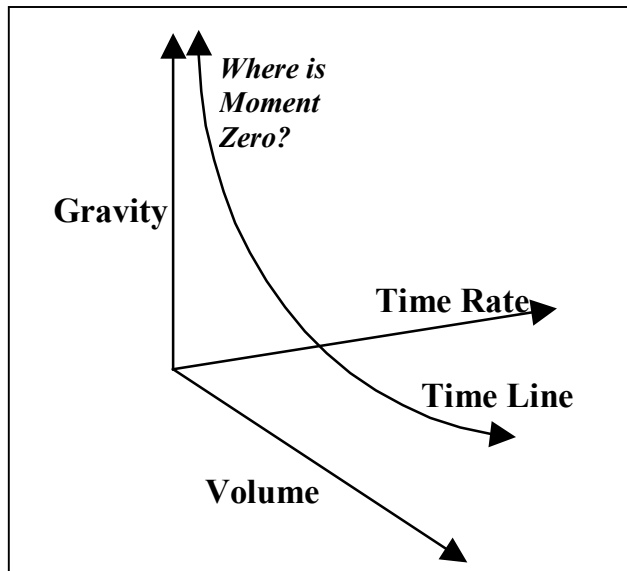


Figure 5 - Behavior of Gravity and rate at which time passes at the center of the universe, as a function of time.

"Moment Zero" is wrought with contradictions and questions that cannot be answered by modern physics. Therefore, either "Moment Zero" doesn't exist, or it exists but is not the beginning. If "Moment Zero" is not the beginning, then physics will never tell us meaningfully when time began, and we can no longer use the beginning of time as a physical argument for God's existence. The other option is that "Moment Zero" doesn't exist in time, but you can get infinitely close, as illustrated in Figure 5. Notice that no matter how close you get, the universe's volume will never quite reach zero, its gravity will always be finite, and time will still pass at some minimal rate. This second option has time bounded at the Big Bang, but again with no *absolute* beginning. With no absolute beginning to point to, we can't use "The Beginning of Time" as an argument to prove that God exists.

The Affects of Quantum Mechanics on the Beginning of Time

In addition to the rate at which time actually proceeds during the first moment of the universe, there is also some question regarding the certainty of events during that time. According to Quantum Mechanics, the universe is uncertain at minute scales. The affect of this uncertainty is usually not seen by us because *conventional* physics are so much more noticeable.

To illustrate Quantum Mechanics, consider a pair of "...photons created when an atom is heated... they have to be polarized at 90 degrees to each other. But as Einstein pointed out, quantum physics tells us that these photons don't have any particular polarization if no one is measuring them.^{ix}" But, as soon as you try and measure the polarization of one of the photons, it makes up its mind and picks one, almost like it was waiting to be measured. In other words, until someone tries to observe the state of a quantum particle, it has no particular state. In other words, it has *every* possible state.

At large scales, quantum states within the universe occur unnoticed. It turns out however that during the first 10^{-43} seconds of the universe, its volume was so small that everything

was determined by quantum states. With the entire universe existing at the quantum level immediately after "Moment Zero", it is impossible to say the universe had any *particular* history. It would seem that the history of the universe included *every* possible history until the first 10^{-43} seconds had passed. Without a single beginning to point at, we can demonstrate that time is bounded, but cannot demonstrate a single absolute beginning.

Time as Part of the Universe

When considering the universe, many people consider all of *space* to be the universe, and then think of the universe as changing over *time*. However, because scientists have demonstrated that physical laws govern time, we know that the universe is actually unchanging, because time is just another dimension within it. In other words, from outside the universe, you would see all of space and all of time right in front of you. Your life on earth is part of the universe, which means your choices essentially help determine what the universe will look like to someone outside it. This is why God can see your choices, can see His own intercession in your life, and yet knows your entire life at the same time, "before" you ever do anything.

If the universe goes back to "Moment Zero" (or just after it), then the first 10^{-43} seconds are part of the universe, too. When God created the universe, He created everything for all time. Therefore, He created the first 10^{-43} seconds, whatever they look like. This also means that at the moment He created the universe, God also created all of history, but gave you input into how history would go, by giving you free will. It's an awesome thing to consider, but it's not proof that God exists.

Why the Beginning of Time Doesn't Require God

As we have seen, time has no absolute beginning. However as part of the universe, time is bounded by the universe's dimensional extents. In a sense you might say that the universe is a multi-dimensional space-time figure that has a definite shape, when viewed from the outside. Is that figure self-existent or created? Because the beginning of time is part of the universe, and because the beginning of time exists simultaneously with the rest of time within the universe, it is possible to view the universe as a geometric figure that simply exists. Furthermore, mere existence doesn't require something to have been created, or else God would require a creator as well. In other words, as an argument for the beginning of the universe, an intellectual considers invoking God *unnecessary*.

For Christians who do not believe the Big Bang occurred, I must say that they may be correct. God is quite capable of creating a universe of any size and state that He chooses. For example, perhaps God created a universe with ready-made stars and planets. But, if He did, then He created them in an expanding universe along with physical laws that allow us to hypothesize what the universe would have looked like had time begun earlier than it did. The problem for us is that we can't tell the difference between a hypothetical past and a real past. Therefore, understanding the Big Bang is *not* a futile exercise, because for someone who doesn't believe in God, he is only going by what *God's own physical laws* predict.

The question is whether the universe is self-existent or created by God, and using physics won't give us an answer. Only your faith in God can answer it for you, so it is your faith you must share, or you risk losing every argument.

The Ontological Argument

Some Christians like to play word games with intellectual unbelievers. The conversation goes something like this:

Christian: Are you really an atheist?

Unbeliever: I am. I do not believe in God.

C: Why not?

U: I do not believe that an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, all good being can possibly exist. It is wrought with contradictions.

C: So, clearly you know what God's qualities would be if He did exist.

U: I know what the Christian's notion of God is, yes.

C: So, you know the qualities of something you believe doesn't exist. If He doesn't exist, how could you know His qualities?

U: I know what qualities *you* would ascribe to Him. All I'm saying is that if He does exist, He cannot be the God that *you* describe.

C: Oh. So, you believe He *could* exist.

U: I didn't say that.

C: Well, if He doesn't exist, then how could we be talking about Him?

And so it continues, a conversation between two people who think the other one is blind. Notice what this conversation is accomplishing... nothing, except perhaps frustration for the atheist. Personally, I do not consider this a very good witness. I say this having probably done it myself a few times.

The premise of the Christian's argument is that we could not possibly talk of something so great as our God if God didn't actually exist. Without actually stating it, the Christian has employed something called the Ontological Argument for God's existence. The gist of the argument is that it's impossible to think of something greater than God is. Since a god that exists is clearly greater than a god that does not, God must therefore exist, or else we couldn't even talk about Him. As it turns out, the Christian's conclusion is correct, but the argument is flawed.

If it turns out that God does not exist, then we are living our lives having faith in a figment of our imagination. The fact that we cannot think of anything greater than this figment does not make it any more real. It only serves to reinforce our delusion. This is how the unbelieving atheist views us. Tools like the Ontological Argument only show the atheist how futile it is for him to engage us in conversation. Will someone who views you that way listen when you start discussing the gospel? He will never let you get that far. He'll just walk away wondering how you could be so blind and illogical.

The Ontological Argument is true from the perspective that after God created man, He revealed His qualities to man. Therefore, the fact that we can talk of God's attributes is a direct result of His existence. However, while this may be a fact, it is not a logical proof. All you can do with this information is to remain consistent when you talk to your

unbelieving friends. If your friend becomes ready to exercise faith, then he will see the truth of God's existence. However, *you* will not have convinced him.

Pascal's Wager

I hope even the atheist will agree that if God exists and sent Jesus to die for our sins, then the Christian is fortunate to have faith, because that is obviously the only way to realize that God exists. There appears to be no logical proof of God's existence to convince an intellectual who has no faith. Does this mean there are no arguments to help bring an intellectual to believe in God? No. There is one, but like all the other arguments we have seen, it is not a proof.

The argument is called Pascal's Wager. The argument is that if God does not exist, then the Christian loses nothing by maintaining faith in God. If God does exist however, then the atheist risks Hell and eternal damnation. If taking either position is considered a wager, then who stands to gain the most? Who stands to lose the most? Another way I've heard it stated is that the atheist had better be right, because the Christian will never know if he's wrong.

I must stress that no one can be saved through this wager. If you live your life as a Christian because you just don't want to take the chance that God doesn't exist, and you do not believe by faith, then you are not saved. If you're not sure whether I'm talking about you, then I'm probably not talking about you. I believe that people know whether their belief is by faith or not. If you say you believe in God through faith, then I am not worried about your salvation. I am concerned about people who genuinely believe they are Christians, but do not point to their faith as the reason for their salvation. For example, they point to their service; they think that teaching Sunday school saves them. Or, they might say that feeding the homeless is the most rewarding thing about serving, but they only provide food, never the Word of God. Only God knows for sure who's who³⁰, and you can only know about yourself for sure.

Any unbeliever who considers himself to be intellectually honest should consider this wager as a challenge to pray to God for faith. He shouldn't pray for a car or a house or a healing, because God's answer might be, "No." Instead, he should simply pray to God for a measure of faith. God always answers yes to that one. Once God provides the faith, it is up to the individual what to do with it. I have suggested this to several friends I care about a great deal, and they haven't done this. They won't pray that prayer, and so they go on with no faith. Emotionally, I don't understand why. Scripturally, I know it's because of Mark 4:15, "When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts." Like I said in Chapter 1, I'm amazed whenever I see it happen.

In Closing

Notice that every Christian intellectual argument I have attacked is an argument about God's existence and often the universe's. The existence of God as the creator of the universe is an issue for Genesis 1:1. In other words, when we try to win souls with

³⁰ Matthew 7:22-23 - "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' "

arguments for God's existence, we aren't even getting past the first verse of the Bible! Genesis 1:1 is where it all starts, but it cannot end there. However, an intellectual unbeliever won't let you get past Genesis 1:1 unless you make your faith a premise of the conversation. Don't challenge your friend to accept proof of God; challenge him to pray to God for faith, and explain to him how the universe works from a perspective that assumes the knowledge obtained from your faith is accurate. Such a conversation will allow you to get past Genesis 1:1, and actually proceed directly to the message of Matthew, that Jesus died for the sins of the faithful and repentant. You may not see God save your friend in that conversation or even the next. However, you can be sure that you have been obedient to Jesus, by spreading the word in a manner that pleases God. If nothing else, you haven't pushed your friend away.

Chapter 3: Refutation of Common Atheistic Objections

Introduction

As we've seen, an intellectual unbeliever can put forth arguments against God's existence. However, these arguments don't prove that God doesn't exist. Now, to be fair, none of my atheist friends claim that their arguments prove anything. Their arguments are simply the reasons why they believe that God doesn't exist, and for this we cannot fault them, because people choose to believe things without proof every day. For example, I have a friend who leased a new car. It turned out to be a lemon. Could he have known the car would give him so much trouble? Not at all. It was reasonable for him to believe that his new car had no problems with it, even though he turned out to be wrong. Therefore, the question we must ask ourselves is whether our intellectual atheist friend is being reasonable, even though he is wrong.

This question of reasonableness is more gray than it is black and white. Consider that if God doesn't exist, then their belief is correct, and being correct should always be considered reasonable. On the other hand, since God does exist and is waiting to be invited into their lives, their refusal to invite Him in is *unreasonable*. However, since asking God for faith would appear in itself to require faith, your friend will only perceive a logical quandary to which you cannot offer an acceptable solution. He wants God's existence demonstrated without any need for faith, and until you do this, he is bound by logic to consider his own beliefs reasonable, and you must be respectful enough to treat him as such. Insulting someone never won a person's soul over to Jesus. Therefore, to effectively witness to your friend, you must take his beliefs seriously.

Considering my friend's arguments against God's existence is a good witness for a couple of reasons. First of all, I can't reasonably expect my arguments to be considered if I'm unwilling to consider his. So, I listen. Second of all, by listening to his arguments, I can know where he's coming from and can formulate arguments that will cause him to think, and possibly reconsider his own beliefs.

Many Christians object to this approach, citing 1 Corinthians 2:4 – 5. Paul wrote, “my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” To this scripture, I wholeheartedly agree! When your friend comes to know the Lord, ask him whether you persuaded him or whether the Holy Spirit did. I promise that the answer won't be you!

What you are doing by engaging in these conversations is not persuasion. You are meeting your friend where he is at, so that you can possibly share the gospel³¹. As long as your goal is to ultimately soften your friend's heart toward the gospel you are doing the same thing Paul did in Acts. The common ground between your friend and yourself is your interest in tickling the intellect with explorations of faith and its relationship to truth.

³¹ Acts 17:22 – 23 - “And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, '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." What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.' ”

Once you've clarified to *yourself* why you are debating God's existence, arguing about God's existence needn't be a threat to your walk with God. Realize that if you're wrong about God, then no harm will come should you be swayed. In actuality however, since God has proven to you that He does exist, you can be certain that God will be with you and will show you the flaw in your friend's arguments, hence reinforcing your faith even further. With God on your side, and a genuine desire to actually see your friend accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior, there need be no threat; there need only be challenges, and God only provides you with challenges He plans to help you overcome³². Realize that anyone – Christian or Atheist – can stubbornly continue in his or her beliefs despite a person's objections. This is called *blind* faith and it even has its place in your walk with God³³. But if you're going to entertain an intellectual about God's existence, then you can't simply play stubborn. Your purpose is to see through the falsehoods, and reveal them as such by providing reasons that support your position; blind faith in God may keep you in God's grace, and is often a fantastic witness before your friends (and enemies), but it rarely wins an intellectual's soul.

As we explore several common criticisms used by many intellectual unbelievers to support their atheism, we will see that many atheists haven't thought their arguments all the way through, because no one has made them do so. This is usually true because the Christian either dismisses these arguments with simple hand waving, or he lets himself be silenced. You must do neither (unless God so leads). When challenged by a friend who is having an honest and open conversation with you, take his arguments seriously, and tell him you will find an answer if you don't have one ready. Then get the answer and follow up. You might not persuade your friend, but he'll respect you. In my opinion, if the atheist is being intellectually honest with himself, then your proper response may cause him to remove the argument from his arsenal. Perhaps eventually he'll be convinced to answer the challenge we discussed in Chapter 2, and actually pray to God for a measure of faith.

Why not believe in Santa Claus?

This is a very common argument against belief in God. After all, if we believe in a being whose existence cannot be proven or disproven then on what grounds can we reject belief in another such being? The assertion is that believing in God disqualifies us from rejecting belief in Santa Claus, unicorns, or life on other planets. Therefore, by rejecting belief in any non-existent being, we are considered to be indicting ourselves by believing in God. The challenge is a reasonable one, but it does have an answer.

The primary thing to remember is that we need not prove that Santa Claus, unicorns, and alien intelligent life are non-existent. Consider that your friend probably agrees that Santa Claus and unicorns *don't* exist; yet, he probably *suspects* (or even believes) that intelligent alien life *does* exist. If that's the case, then your friend is doing almost exactly

³² Ephesians 6:10,11,16 - "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil... in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one."

³³ Matthew 9:21-22 - "...for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch His garment, I shall get well.' But Jesus turning and seeing her said, 'Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.' And at once the woman was made well."

what you are. He is *rejecting* the existence of some unprovable life forms while *accepting* the existence of other unprovable life forms. Undoubtedly, he has thought this through and believes there are rational explanations for his beliefs. Therefore, to be intellectually honest with himself, he has to allow for the possibility that you have rational reasons for believing in God even though you don't believe in Santa Claus, unicorns, or intelligent alien life.

If you find yourself in this conversation, please acknowledge that most intellectuals realize they have no proof of alien intelligence. Their arguments however are rational. Because they believe in evolution, the odds of intelligent life happening only once in the universe seems incredible to them. Well, if God doesn't exist, then they are right; it *is* incredible. Therefore, it must be clear that you are not trying to prove your friend is wrong. After all, we cannot prove God's existence to them any more than your friend can prove an alien's existence to himself.

Before embarking on this conversation with your friend, you must clarify for yourself whether the conversation is even necessary: if your intellectual friend already considers you rational and agrees that rational people can believe in God for rational reasons, then you are in agreement and need not go on. "How can we be in agreement," you might ask, "since we don't agree on God's existence?" Remember that convincing your friend to believe in God misses the point of your conversation with him. If anyone is going to convince your friend to believe in God, it will be God. You need only remove the obstacles, and you can only do that by showing him that the *result* of your faith is reasonable and rational, even if faith itself doesn't seem so to him. If he agrees that you are rational in how you follow your faith, then you have succeeded in 1 Peter 3:15. Therefore, the only two reasons for embarking on this line of thought with an intellectual are that he either considers it irrational to believe in God, or he realizes that it can be rational for some and irrational for others and needs you demonstrate where you fall in that spectrum.

Attempts to Relate to Mankind

Every substantive difference I will discuss between God and other unprovable beings stems from God's attempts to have a relationship with mankind. In fact, God's attempts aren't only in the here and now, but go back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Even after they sinned, God sought them out. Granted, He sought them out to kick them out of the garden. But even after He did that, God remained with mankind.

An atheist will not think that any evidence you have of God's communications with mankind is really from God; logically, he could be right. However, if God exists, it would explain why we have a history of people thinking they've perceived God, a history that purports to go back to the beginnings of civilization. If God really exists, then why be surprised that God communicated with the first recorded people?

Religions Based on God

An irrefutable fact is the existence of religions centered on God. In fact, the very first recorded God-centered religion is still around today, or at least the modern day incarnation of it is still with us. I am speaking of Judaism. One can debate whether it's still the same religion today as it was then. One might even attempt to claim a similar history for the Arab people. However, Judaism is the only *religion* which documents a

history purporting to lead all the way back to 2,000 BC and, in a way, showing continuity leading back to creation. Of course, your friend may then point out that there is a multitude of religions based on God that are not Jewish but Christian. That is true enough, and we will deal with that in the next chapter. The point here is that if God exists, then why shouldn't there be the historical continuity present in Judaism? If God exists, then I'd go so far as to say that such continuity should be *expected*.

Literature Claiming to be Inspired by God

Judaism has a rich history with God, recorded largely in the Bible. The Bible explains God's nature, His will, His goals, His love for mankind, His plans for the world, and far more than I can cover here. The point is that if God exists, then it must make sense for Him to have inspired what could only be considered His instruction book, a guide to knowing and understanding Him. Furthermore, if He did inspire such a book, should it be surprising that it actually claims to be inspired by Him?

The Persistence of the Jewish People

Even those who have no apparent belief in God acknowledge the historical persistence of the Jewish people against insurmountable odds^x. Civilizations have come and gone since Abraham met God in the book of Genesis. Many of these lost civilizations are even numbered among the dozens of others that have and continue to try wiping out the Jews without success. If God exists, that certainly would explain how, of all of the ancient civilizations recorded, it is the Jewish people that have maintained their identity within the mainstream world, surviving pogrom after pogrom, yet seeing their ancient city of Jerusalem returned to them in modern times. In fact, if God did choose the Jews as the Bible says, should we be surprised that they are the one civilization to survive the kind of persecution they have? Some point at their suffering as evidence that God doesn't exist. On the contrary, isn't their survival evidence that he does?

Since you believe in God, then why not believe in Santa Claus?

Not only has Santa Claus never made a recorded attempt to relate to an adult, but even the children who believe in Santa Claus are actually being lied to by adults who themselves don't believe. Therefore, it is more reasonable to believe in God than in Santa Claus.

There are no religions centered on Santa Claus – secularism doesn't count since it's not a religion, though it shares many of a religion's qualities (e.g., a sense of moral and social conscience, positions regarding God's role in society, holidays to celebrate what's considered important, etc.). As for worship, no one over 10 years old worships Santa Claus, and even this "worship" only goes back a few hundred years. As for all of the literature about him, none of it seriously claims to be inspired by Santa Claus.

Given our belief in God, it should be noted that the present existence of Santa Claus would contradict the existence of Jesus Christ as Messiah, since both are competing for attention on Christmas. This is an argument unique to Santa Claus. It doesn't hold against life on other planets or for unicorns. Basically, Santa Claus isn't an immortal being living at the North Pole, but an outgrowth of the life of Saint Nicholas, a Christian who considered Jesus Christ to be *his* Lord and Savior. Surely, this saint of Jesus would shudder if he knew that secularism would one day replace Jesus with Santa Claus.

Since you believe in God, then why not believe in unicorns?

I had an acquaintance who asked me why I don't believe in the Pink Unicorn. "Its existence is no less provable than God's is, but you believe in God," he said. True enough. However, while it would seem reasonable to perceive an historical attempt on God's part to connect with me based on the arguments above, there are no similar arguments about the Pink Unicorn.

Since you believe in God, then why not believe in life on other planets?

The answer starts with the fact that there is no proof of intelligent life on other planets. However, since we believe in God without such "proof", stopping there is admittedly a copout.

Given all of the tangible reasons for believing in God – the *tangible* Bible, the *tangible* Jews, their *tangible* history and *tangible* country, along with the multitude of *tangible* religions – there are no similar arguments for intelligent life. There are *rumors* that the government has made contact with intelligent alien life, but the public in general has definitely not made contact. There are *individuals* with stories of abduction, but the seemingly interdimensional properties of some of these abductions implies that if God exists, then these abductions could be by fallen angels and not aliens³⁴. In any case, aliens have yet to abduct someone prominent as a means toward forging a relationship with mankind, as opposed to abducting someone unknown just to perform crude and sometimes cruel experiments on their anatomy. Finally, the literature about intelligent alien life is *admittedly* hearsay and speculation, while the Bible is *self-claimed* to be the inspired word of God.

By the way, make sure to point out that if there is intelligent life on other planets, then Jesus died for their sins, too, and God will find a way to spread the Gospel from Earth to them. This is necessary because Jesus was only to die once, and He died here on Earth. Therefore, logically, life could exist elsewhere, and God will see to it that His will will be done, even if we don't know how.

Summary

No other unprovable being is demonstrably courting mankind to believe in him or her, at least not in ways that are obvious or direct. On the other hand, the signs of God not only tell us in words to believe in Him, but they tell us the rewards for doing so and the consequences for not. Of course to your friend, this will only demonstrate that you've been brainwashed; it demonstrates that you've "fallen for it." Common arguments that follow paint God as cruel, racist, and exclusivistic if He exists. So on our end, we must acknowledge actual history, as it has actually happened, even though it differs from how mankind would have wanted His story to happen. So, given that actual history has been admittedly cruel and unfair to most people, we can see the truth that God's ways are not ours³⁵. He may not have done things like many people would have told Him – such as preventing injustices instead of repaying them – but the Bible, the persistence of the Jewish people, and the other aspects we've been discussing only make sense if God is

³⁴ Christians differ sharply on this theory.

³⁵ Isaiah 55:8-9 - " 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.' "

really there. Again, this doesn't prove God exists, and it doesn't prove that other beings don't exist. However, it does demonstrate how a reasonable person can conclude that God exists without having to accept other things that cannot be proven either.

A Word about Atheism

We must acknowledge that similar arguments can be derived for atheism. There is literature exploring the non-existence of God dating back thousands of years. There are starving populations which have no apparent belief in God, the implication being that God is causing them to starve because of their disbelief³⁶. The mechanics of the world are being discovered by science, which makes the world seem less and less mysterious every day. If all we're trying to prove is that believing in God is logically reasonable, then we must acknowledge that atheism also logically reasonable. What this shows is that atheism, though not provable, is more reasonable than believing in the Pink Unicorn.

Occam's Razor

Intellectuals think that we make the universe too complicated. They believe that God, as a concept, is unnecessary to explain the universe. From their point of view, it would be much more honest of us to simply proclaim that the universe is unexplainable. Instead, we insist that the universe is explainable, but that the unexplainable God is the explanation. Why don't we just say that we can't explain the universe and be done with it? Why complicate matters so?

If the reason we believe in God is so we can explain the universe, then the challenge to our beliefs is reasonable. After all, with all that we can explain without invoking the concept of God, it seems reasonable to proceed as though everything else will eventually be explainable without needing to invoke the concept of God. The problem however is that not all of us believe in God just so we can explain the universe. Not all of us believe in God simply to give meaning to our life, or even to life in general. In fact, not all of us believe in God simply because our parents said He's there, and we knew they wouldn't lie. As it turns out, there are a number of us theists who believe in God for the simple reason that we can perceive His presence. This doesn't mean that we looked at the stars and concluded that God must exist. It also doesn't mean that we observed the order of the universe and concluded that it had to have a creator. Those things are true, and they enforce our faith but for many of us it wasn't what made us believe.

Our ability to perceive God is innate. It is most closely described as a feeling, though not quite physical. It's like having an impression come over you that you must call home immediately, and it turns out that a loved one just got hurt. Now, I've never had an innate feeling that I had to call home to check on something, but I have felt guided to make decisions that didn't entirely make sense given only what I consciously knew. So, since following these "feelings" ultimately result in making the correct decision, I believe that God, the Holy Spirit to be specific, guides me.

Even before opening myself to being guided by the Holy Spirit, I had an innate perception of God that I could not explain. I just knew He was there for no particular reason. When I look at a table, why do I see it? I see it because it's really there. If I sense God as clearly as I sense the table, could it be because God's there? That seemed

³⁶ We'll discuss this in detail later on.

to me the easiest explanation at the time and I went with it. Since then, I've read scripture describing the Holy Spirit and have spent time striving to know God as Jesus and Paul exhorted their followers to know Him. That was when I started perceiving His will in situations where I had no logical reason for choosing one action over another, situations where the choice I felt guided toward made me apprehensive one time, secure the next. Sometimes I feel guided to do what I want, sometimes what I don't want. I'm not in contact with God like this 24/7, but when I feel it and allow Him to do in me what He wills to do, I am at my happiest and most secure. This statement is the kind of proclamation that intellectuals always have a field day with. However, if God truly is my guide, shouldn't that be how I feel when I follow Him?

Given what seems to me an ability to perceive God in a personal way, how should someone like myself proceed? I'm either perceiving nothing or something personal. It's too consistent to be nothing, so I must proceed like it's something personal. This seems to me the simplest approach for dealing with my perceptions of the universe, and simplicity is something that intellectuals like me strive for. I therefore believe that God exists, and it colors all that I see and do... including my attempts to explain the universe.

Application of Occam's Razor

Here is a description of Occam's Razor, taken from George H. Smith's "The Case Against God". Named after the fourteenth-century theologian, William of Occam, "this dictum states that one should never multiply explanations or increase their complexity beyond necessity. An explanation should be as simple and direct as possible, and any excess baggage should be discarded."

As formulated above by Smith, I believe Occam's razor is a reasonable rule of thumb in pursuing truth. However, Smith goes on to quote Mortimer J. Adler to express *his* interpretation of the dictum,

“...Occam's razor is a two-edged instrument – one that works in opposite directions. It eliminates theoretical constructs that cannot be shown to be necessary for explanatory purposes; but it also justifies the retention of theoretical constructs the need for which can be *shown* *.”^{xi}

Smith's application of Occam's Razor assumes that an explanation is simple only if it incorporates constructs that are *necessary*. In other words, if God is not *necessary* to explain the universe, then any explanation incorporating God is unnecessarily complicated, and therefore doesn't survive Occam's Razor.

To support his position, Smith develops a dialog in which use of the five senses is an acceptable way to perceive reality. It has to be acceptable, because anything else would leave us in a position that prevents us from coping with the universe in any meaningful fashion. In other words, defining the universe in terms of what can be perceived with the five senses *is* necessary, so does not overly complicate the universe. Faith however seems to be an incomprehensible sense, yet theists (or at least Christians) claim knowledge from it. Here is how Smith ends the dialog, concluding that using faith to acquire knowledge is not rational:

* Emphasis author's

“If the Christian has discovered a new means of perception, I am perfectly willing to listen to his claim, provided that he is willing to argue for his assertion. Perhaps man possesses perceptual powers of which he is presently unaware. I don’t see any evidence for this, but I’ll grant the possibility for the sake of argument. My argument with the Christian is that he claims to have experienced God, but he refuses to explain the process by which he, a physical organism, experienced this supernatural being. I won’t limit him arbitrarily to the traditional five senses, but I will demand that he present evidence for his new perceptual powers. Has he discovered a new sense? Fine, then let him tell us about it so we can test it.

“No Christian has ever succeeded in explaining just how he perceives his mysterious God. He claims to have knowledge of a mysterious, unknowable being, having gained this knowledge in some mysterious, unknowable manner. This is totally unacceptable.

“If the Christian wishes to be taken seriously, he must explain, not only what he claims to know, but how he claims to know it. If he did not acquire his knowledge through the senses, by what means did he acquire it? The burden of explanation lies with him... The atheist simply wants to know what the theist believes in and how he acquired his knowledge. If explanations are not forthcoming, the atheist will remain an atheist.”

The problem it seems is that faith is not a physical sense the way that sight is a physical sense. Furthermore, because we cannot describe our sense in a way that enables our friend to see God, it is no better for him than if we’d made it up. Unfortunately for him, we didn’t make it up, but I hope you can see why his application of Occam’s Razor keeps him distant from God³⁷. In his opinion, our wishful thinking has fooled us into believing we’ve perceived something that isn’t there, and explaining the universe in terms of an imaginary friend could unreasonably complicate the search for truth.

For us on the other hand, having perceived God personally, how can we now proceed otherwise? Once somebody meets God, continuing life as though God doesn’t exist would be to live in voluntary ignorance. I have found that accepting God as He is simplifies my life and my understanding of the universe. Because I’ve perceived Him, He is as necessary to my outlook on life as anything I’ve seen or heard is. To ignore Him, or worse deny Him, would unnecessarily complicate my life and my understanding of the universe. What is simple now can remain simple only if I acknowledge what I have experienced. Therefore, by applying Occam’s Razor to *my* life, I justify to my friend my continued belief in God.

Unfortunately, any application of Occam’s Razor does not affect a person’s belief, but only reinforces it. Adding God to the equation is too complicated when you don’t believe in Him, and removing God from the equation is too complicated when you have knowingly experienced Him. Therefore, anyone using Occam’s Razor to come to a conclusion about God is only justifying what he already believes.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:14-15a - "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things..."

Why atheists should not consider God a complication

The atheist is right: the universe can be largely explained without invoking God. For example, when there are claims of a miracle, it is usually the case that God used the laws of physics to do His will. As a result, an unbeliever will be able to point at the natural aspects of the event as though it is the complete explanation without contradicting himself. However, we mustn't let God's use of His own laws be proof that He doesn't exist. That would be absurd.

God created the laws of physics when He created the universe. In addition, the laws of physics don't require God's interaction, though theists know that God chooses to interact with His creation anyway. If you wanted to insist that the laws of physics require God in any way at all, it would have to be the requirement that God create the universe where the laws of physics reside. However, as we saw before, even creation of the universe cannot be proven necessary, even though it happened.

When we talk of the universe coming into being, it is common to think of the Big Bang. For many theists, the Big Bang was God's means of creating the universe. However, recall our discussion of time in Chapter 2, and our conclusion that the Big Bang itself – because it happened over time – is part of the universe. It may have been the means for creating all matter *within* the universe, but that is quite different than saying it was the means of creating the universe itself. Remember that the Big Bang, if it happened, occurred within a multi-dimensional space-time object that we *call* the universe. Any action to create that object must have occurred from without it, not within it. Therefore, the action required to create the universe and its physical laws must be an action that could not be explained by those same physical laws. Therefore, there could be no evidence of this creative action unless you consider mere existence to be proof of creation. But, as we showed in Chapter 2, existence is not proof of an object's creation; for example, God wasn't created, and we know by faith that He exists. Therefore, if God exists, then a study of the universe's physical properties will result in exactly what it has... an explanation of the universe's mechanics that do not prove or even indicate that God necessarily created it.

Since a scientific study of the universe can only tell you how it works, then saying God exists shouldn't change our understanding of God's design. For example, consider a Christian who believes that God created the universe in six literal 24-hour days. Suppose he wanted to study what the laws of physics say regarding the possibility that Adam saw a star in the sky on the eve of the sixth day (it's debatable due to the firmament, but just suppose). Well, if the star Adam saw was one million light years away, then the laws of physics require that light left that star one million years before. This conclusion cannot be argued against, because the laws of physics really say that. At this point, the Christian may be at a loss to explain this because he believes the world at that time was only six days old. So, he will probably conclude that God created the universe with the star's light already in transit. If God created the universe in only six days, then the Christian's conclusion is correct, because the laws of physics would require it. God is certainly capable of it.

Now, this is the point where the skeptic will invoke Occam's Razor and say that the Christian has overly complicated things, requiring God to create the universe with light in transit so that a star could be seen on the sixth day even though it's a million light years

away. Using Occam's Razor, a valid conclusion is that the universe wasn't created in six days, and the universe is actually far older than the 10,000 years that this Christian believes it to be. However, the conclusion should not be that God doesn't exist; nor should the conclusion should be that the Bible is wrong. The strongest statement that you can make is a suggestion that perhaps the Christian is interpreting Genesis wrong.

Also, notice what made the Christian's conclusion overly complicated in the opinion of the skeptic (and even other Christians). The complicating factor was the Christian's scriptural interpretation that the six creation days were six literal 24-hour days. On the other hand, while the Christian's explanation may or may not be overly complicated, his *scientific* conclusions were the same as the atheist's: without a miracle, the light leaving Adam's star needs a million years to get to earth.

Realize that the complicating factor in this Christian's inquiry was not his innate sense that God exists. Exercising his spiritual sense resulted in the same scientific conclusion that the atheist arrived at. That is, the laws of physics require a star's light to travel for a million years before someone a million light years away sees it. The Christian's attempt to reconcile physics with a given interpretation of scripture may be vulnerable to Occam's Razor, but the existence of his spiritual sense is not.

To summarize:

- Because there can be no evidence that the universe is created
- Because science does not test the innate sense that Christians have of God's existence and presence
- Because God tends to work within His own rules of the universe
- Because complications come from *attempts to reconcile* science with scripture

- Therefore, invoking God, by itself, does not change physics
- Therefore, invoking God, by itself, does not change the conclusions of physics
- Therefore, invoking God, by itself, does not complicate the universe
- Therefore, God's existence, by itself, is not prey for Occam's Razor
- Therefore, an innate sense of God's existence is not prey for Occam's Razor

As we've seen, Occam's Razor doesn't rule out the existence of God. In fact, as we'll see, Occam's Razor actually supports belief in God.³⁸

Occam's Razor says to believe your senses

Application of Occam's Razor is useful in judging truth. The idea is that between simple explanations and complicated ones, the simple one is usually correct. Describing the universe in terms of what the five physical senses reveal does lead one toward truth, but only truths that can be observed with those five senses. In other words, without a spiritual sense, one will not conclude spiritual truth.

³⁸ For more discussion on Creation and God's existence, see Chapter 5, the sub-section called, "Does belief in God conflict with science?"

Consider a man blind from birth. Give him an orange balloon and ask him to describe it. Will he say it's orange? Unless he can tell the color with his hands, he will not say it is orange. Suppose you tell him it's orange. Can he confirm it? Not by himself, because he still cannot see it. Will he believe you? Probably, especially if he's the only blind person in the room and everyone else tells him it's orange. However, he still has no idea what it's like to see. All he can do is rely on your sight to tell him things that he can't understand anyway. But, he'll take your word for it because seeing is the rule, not the exception.

Now suppose that this blind man has grown up in a community of blind people who have no idea that sight even exists. One day, a sighted stranger shows up with an orange balloon, and he asks the blind man to describe it. Like before, he'll say it's a balloon but won't say it's orange. Let's say that the stranger tells him it's orange. Now what? Will he take the stranger's word for it? Of course not! Not only does he have no idea what the stranger is talking about, but no one else does either! To them, the stranger is overcomplicating the universe. It is highly likely that no matter how cohesive the stranger demonstrates his picture of the universe to be, it will forever seem too complicated to all of these blind people, because being blind here is the rule, not the exception. In fact, their top philosopher might make a similar argument to George H. Smith's. They have no theoretical objection to the idea that this strange man has this other sense which he calls sight. They just want him to demonstrate to them how it works. Naturally, he cannot, because they have no optical nerves with which they can even attempt to duplicate the stranger's ability to discern color. They may call him a dogmatist, and claim that he cannot really see this "orange", whatever it is. It's just wishful thinking on his part, an attempt to perceive meaning in the universe because this stranger needs to.

Now let's suppose that this first stranger is not the only seeing person to invade this community. Suppose three other people who can see arrive, and that each person independently confirms what the first stranger has been saying, that the balloon has this strange property called "orange". They start the Orange movement. Now, what will the blind people conclude? Well, they may conclude that all four strangers are simply feeding off of each other's insecurities, each saying the balloon is orange, but not really understanding what it is they agree on. After all, they can't even agree on a description of what orange means!

Let's add one more person. Suppose someone colorblind arrives, someone who cannot see the color red. To him, without the ability to see the red wavelengths within the orange, the balloon will appear to be yellow. If that person doesn't realize he is colorblind, then he will agree with the blind folk that the members of the Orange movement don't know what they're talking about. But, he'll say it's because the balloon is yellow, not orange! Now what is this community of blind people supposed to think? Furthermore, if this colorblind man finds a wife and has sighted kids who are colorblind, you'll have what appears to be another movement: the Yellow movement! We now have an Orange movement and a Yellow movement, and the blind people are still blind, and probably think these sighted people of both movements are all nuts!

We can keep going with this scenario if we choose, but the point here should be clear. The fact that one group has a sense that another group is without doesn't negate the

validity of that sense. Furthermore, since the sighted people really do see, and an understanding of light waves and colorblindness explains why some see orange and others see yellow, it's safe to say that the truth is the simplest explanation. Any other explanation will necessarily be too complicated, because it's rooted in theory and supposition, and fails to explain the genuine common experience of the sighted ones. The truth however, is simpler because it's rooted in a combination of science and experience, even though the experience is limited to only a few, and the science can only verify experience with color for the ones who see. It's the same thing with people of faith and their innate sense that God is there.

The reason why Occam's Razor is used to discount the existence of God is the same reason those blind people we made up discount the color orange. They can explain their own experiences just fine without the color orange. Even though the color orange exists, acknowledging it won't change a single thing for them. The only reason it would ever help for them to accept the color orange is if they could suddenly see it.

Suppose they could decide to see the orange. Suppose they weren't actually blind, but that their eyes had always been shut and successfully blocked out all signs of light. Suppose they had no clue that there was a muscle they could flex to open their eyes, but you told them it was there. Would they be able to flex it? Probably not. Would they be willing to try? Some would and some wouldn't. Suppose you offered to show them how to open their eyes, would they let you? Some would but others wouldn't. If you think about it, prying their eyes open and letting light pour in would actually hurt, and their brain would make no sense of the input for possibly several weeks if ever, because it's never had to deal with light and colors before. The last thing they'd be able to do is distinguish the orange, even though you're holding it right in front of them.

Sadly, this is the state of most atheist and agnostic intellectuals. They cannot sense God, but they could if they chose to. Unfortunately, the longer they wait to open their eyes, the harder it will be for them to adjust to the light. They may have tried, but they couldn't make sense of it immediately, so chalked it up to wishful thinking on their part. It may even be that light is making its way into the person's soul in the form of a conscience, the ability to empathize, the desire to find purpose in their existence. However, because they can explain all of these things without actually perceiving God Himself, they write Him off, saying that introducing God is an unnecessary complication, even though people all around perceive Him and proclaim their witness of Him.

How can so many people inexplicably sense a God? Simple: it's because He's there. Why can't two people who sense God explain God even to each other? Simple: because they don't have to; they both see Him, so immediately know what the other is talking about. How come different religions arise? Simple: because many people are colorblind, seeing only some of the truth and assume it's the whole truth. Why does one religion claim it's the only way, while the others say that any old way will work? Simple: it's because in a world of orange and yellow, someone who can't see red sees only yellow, making all ways look equally yellow. It takes someone who isn't colorblind to realize where the orange is, and point people to it.

The reason our way is better is because knowing the truth lets us explain everyone's observations without judging them. Christians have found that there are theories that

embrace both the Bible and science completely. Atheists embrace science but have to ascribe motives and emotions to our religion that aren't there in order make it seem like God, angels, and souls don't exist. Can we prove we're right? No we can't. But, remember that the orange movement couldn't convince anyone else that orange even existed, even when they held it in their very hands.

The next time someone invokes Occam's Razor to challenge your perception of God, take him up on it. It could be that you think you perceive God, but He doesn't really exist, and you don't have a spiritual sense. It's just your mind playing tricks on you with your hopes and desires. The other option is that God is there and you have a spiritual sense that can tell.

Your intellectual friend believes his senses, and you should believe yours... because it's simpler that way.

Epicurean Argument against the Existence of God

At this point, we have shown that believing in God is reasonable historically and experientially. However, even if your friend grants you these arguments, you still haven't proven anything. But, let's suppose that he allows for the possibility that God exists. He will still argue that God's nature couldn't be what you claim. One of the biggest arguments against God is the fact of evil. Here is one formulation of what is called the "Epicurean Argument" against God's existence, along with the skeptic's characterization of the Christian response:

"The gods either [can] take away evil from the world and will not, or, being willing to do so cannot; or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are both able and willing. If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can, but will not, then they are not benevolent. If they are neither able nor willing, then they are neither omnipotent nor benevolent. Lastly, if they are both able and willing to annihilate evil, how does it exist?" The Epicurean argument cannot be answered. The religionists simply explain there is 'evil' in the world; and, anyway, who are we to attempt to understand all the ways of God?^{xii}

The writer above is correct. You will not be able to answer the argument to your friend's satisfaction. However, he is also right when he implies that dismissing evil's existence with simple hand waving is an unsatisfactory response. Therefore, if you allow your friend to engage you in this conversation, then remember, as before, you are only seeking to explain. If your arguments do not sway, or are simply unpalatable to your friend, at least he will have heard the truth.

Biblically, it is a fact that God created angels, and that many of those angels became evil³⁹. God also created people and many of them are evil, too. In fact, your atheist friend will probably agree that even good people are capable of evil, but simply choose not to do evil. If we assume God exists, then the question to answer is why the existence of evil does not make God evil, does not negate His ambivalence, and does not negate His omnipotence. To answer this question will require an understanding of free will, and how this works into God's plan. As we will see, to conclude that evil precludes God's existence will lead us to the logical absurdity that God's existence precludes free will!

³⁹ Isaiah 14:12 - "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!" (NKJV)

Free Will

Free will is the ability to do something contrary to your nature. Dogs for example have no free will, because they always act within their nature. When a dog gets hungry, it eats. Generally, it does not forgo eating. You could *train* your dog not to eat until given permission, but the dog is still going according to its nature, because his nature is also to please you. If it pleases you to wait before eating, then your dog will wait. However, if you have him wait too long, your dog will eat anyway. It's not a question of what your dog wills, but a question of which urge is the strongest at the moment.

People have free will. A person can voluntarily go on a diet. Diets are contrary to man's nature, because man's nature is to eat whatever he wants whenever he's hungry, the same as a dog. On his own, a dog would never go on a diet. A person however would.

You can train a dog not to eat, but you have to *convince* a person not to eat. A person could be trained using torture, but even then therapy can help the person regain his control, his free will over himself.

If you question whether you have free will, then recall the last time you skipped a dessert you really wanted. Did you have a reason, or were you responding to an urge to not eat the dessert? If you responded to reason, then you exercised free will. Dogs don't exercise reason. They satisfy urges while avoiding pain.

As I hope you see by these examples, the question of whether you have free will is not a philosophical one, but a practical one. We perceive an ability to choose, and that perception is independent of our desires. In people, desire is not the *determining* factor in making a choice; it is only a *motivating* factor. Interestingly, the philosophical objection to free will does not dispute the fact that you perceive motivation in exercising it. Philosophy only calls into question whether your perception of free will is accurate. If you think about it, that gets you nowhere. A person who *chooses* to argue that there is no free will has to argue that he had no choice when he made the argument, and that even his realization of his *lack* of free will was not his choice either. In the meantime, while he's driving home, he'll have to choose whether to run that yellow light up ahead. If he believes in Occam's Razor, then ask him what's simpler: a) he perceives free will because he has free will, or b) natural selection determined that there is an evolutionary advantage in perceiving a free will that isn't there, and for some reason this advancement has happened only in human beings.

Free Will and God's Plan

One of God's reasons for creating us was so we could worship Him. However, He didn't want to force us. He only wanted the worship if it was sincere. This required Him to give us free will. Quite obviously, many sincerely worship God, and everyone else doesn't. In that respect, God's will is fulfilled when His worshippers gather and sincerely thank Him and praise Him for all that He is and does.

The hitch with free will is that it gives them the choice to do anything they are truly capable of doing, including murder and robbery. In other words, man's free will results in evil. To prevent this evil would require God to create humans without free will, or to create only those humans that would choose to do no evil. However, creating humans without free will would prevent them from sincerely worshipping Him and creating only humans that would choose to do no evil is a logical absurdity. The reason it is absurd is

because a person can choose to turn away from evil only if evil exists, and evil must exist if free will exists because the ability to kill or rob would still be there, or else our will is not really free. In short, evil exists because God gave people free will, and people choose to do evil things.

God's Omnipotence

Part of the Epicurean Argument is that if God *cannot* prevent evil then He is not omnipotent. As we saw earlier, God could have prevented evil by not creating angels or humans. Therefore, God *chose* not to prevent evil.

God's Benevolence

The other part of the Epicurean Argument is that if God is omnipotent but allows evil to exist, then He is not benevolent. On the contrary, given that God created people in part to worship Him, it is His benevolence that prevents Him from creating people that worship Him *unconditionally* and are incapable of choosing otherwise. It is an unpleasant outcome of free will that choices to do evil will sometimes result in evil.

As for the results of evil, God promises rewards in Heaven for those who can do evil but choose to do good⁴⁰. Furthermore, He promises rewards in Heaven for those who suffer evil and endure it sincerely in His name⁴¹. Since Heaven is a paradise unlike anything imaginable on Earth, and is equally accessible to all, God's benevolence survives intact.

God's Choice

I have hit on two things about God's will that cannot be left hanging. The first is that He created us to worship Him voluntarily. The second is that He compensates His worshippers for the evil they endure with treasures in Heaven when they die. What about everyone else, the ones who choose not to worship Him? What is their reward for enduring evil? Frankly, they receive no reward but are punished in Hell for the evil they voluntarily contributed to the world, and every one has contributed something evil. God does offer them a way out before they die on Earth however, which is by repenting for that evil and becoming a voluntary worshipper of God. A repentant evildoer is forgiven his sins and God exacts the punishment on a substitute sacrifice. Christians are so named because we believe that our substitute sacrifice is Jesus Christ. This way the evil we contribute to the world is still punished, and we are rewarded for enduring the evil of others. God's benevolence is in the fact that all people are granted the offer to repent and become voluntary worshippers of God.

If your friend lets you explain this much to him, then hopefully he will continue challenging you, asking you questions about God, Jesus, and salvation. Tell him! As usual, your ultimate goal is to share the gospel with him, because God doesn't want anyone to go to Hell. God wants your friend to repent and worship Him. In fact, point out the fact that God loves him so much that He has chosen to have you share this truth with Him, because God doesn't want Him to perish. If your friend asks why God doesn't

⁴⁰ Revelation 20:12 - "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."

⁴¹ Romans 8:16-17 - "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."

just save him anyway, the answer is because God would then be ignoring his free will. Why grant a person free will if God's only going to ignore it?

I can almost guarantee your friend won't be persuaded right away. That's okay. All you can do is present the truth. God will do the work. Should your friend make his choice to acknowledge God's omnipotence and accept God's benevolence, the glory will be God's.

Conclusion

Notice that the idea isn't to win the argument over whether or not God exists, but to show that you understand your friend's position and have considered it, and then to explain why you are not persuaded. That's more than most Christians do when arguing with an agnostic or atheist. Usually, a Christian will simply dismiss the argument, because his/her faith is correct. However, your faith is not proof to the atheist that he is wrong. If you really want to reach this person for Christ, there must be some give and take. Answer your friend's questions, and respond to his challenges. Dismissing his arguments only makes you look weak-minded and naïve.

Please take this word of caution: your point cannot be to convert. Your only point should be to demonstrate why you are being reasonable, to show that you have thought about your faith. You want to show that should God decide to move in your friend's heart, he'll be able to think back to his discussions with you, and remember why accepting His invitation is a reasonable thing to do. So, don't be frustrated when he doesn't believe, and don't try to frustrate him back. Just thank your Lord that He used you to potentially prepare the heart of an intellectual you care about to accept Christ as his savior. Remember that you're arguing with their mind. Only God can reach their spirit.

Chapter 4: Answers to Honest Atheist Questions

The intellectual arguments we considered in Chapter 3 are not designed by the intellectual world to persuade us, but to stump us. Recall when you've heard these arguments thrown at you, and consider your initial response. Were you persuaded? Probably not. However, you may have been stumped, meaning you had no response, except that you believe by faith. At that point, the conversation probably ended. The questions in this chapter are a little different. They are not designed to stump. The answers usually seem pretty easy: yes, no, John 3:16, etc. However, the simple answer sounds silly or foolish to the intellectual asking the question, and he knows this before asking it. Instead of trying to stump you, he's trying to point out how foolish your answers are.

Hearing your answer will often prove his point for him: that you don't think about your faith, that you're willing to believe unbelievable or silly things, or that your church has done a great job of brainwashing you. Don't avoid answering these questions when they're asked, but if you want to be taken seriously, then you will need to get to the heart of why the question is being asked. "What does the answer say about me?" It's this question that you must address in order to have a truly constructive conversation. If your argument is logically cohesive and self-consistent then any objection that your friend has will reduce to the fact that you have faith and he doesn't. But, if you've already agreed on this fact, then the question has merely come full circle; such a conclusion is not negative. The conversation might stop at this point, but your friend will have heard the truth.

Questions from an ex-Christian Evangelist

Following are a series of questions found at the conclusion of Charles Templeton's, "Farewell to God". He once professed to be a Christian, but died an agnostic atheist. He started his Christian life partnering with no less than Billy Graham, and they evangelized together for many years. Templeton however never found true fulfillment in God, and doubted his faith for years. Because Christians could not answer the questions he had with anything more than, "just have faith," he came out of it an atheist. However, he was an agnostic atheist, believing that God could exist, but isn't personal if He does. At the end of his book, having discussed with the reader his criticism of Christian faith and his judgement of the church, he posed the following questions for all Christians to consider. I agree that we should consider them, because they all have answers that Charles Templeton may not have grasped or even considered. As we go through them, you should notice that the strict biblical answer does not usually address the question being asked when you read between the lines. His questions are much deeper than they appear, and providing a simple biblical answer is not sufficient for you to be taken seriously. I have preserved the wording of Templeton's questions so as not to lose anything.

Is religious belief determined by environment?

Q: Is it not likely that had you been born in Cairo you would be a Muslim and, as 840 million people do, would believe that “there is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet”?

Q: If you have been born in Calcutta would you not in all probability be a Hindu and, as 650 million people do, accept the Vedas and the Upanishads as sacred scriptures and hope sometime in the future to dwell in Nirvana?

Q: Is it not problematic that, had you been born in Jerusalem, you would be a Jew and, as some 13 million people do, believe that Yahweh is God and that the Torah is God’s Word?

Q: Is it not likely that had you been born in Peking, you would be one of the millions who accept the teachings of Buddha or Confucius or Lao-Tse and strive to follow their teachings and example?

Q: Is it not likely that you, the reader, are a Christian because your parents were before you?

One knee-jerk Christian response to the challenge that our environment determines our beliefs is the following.

“I’d have become a Christian no matter where I was born. God knew the circumstances I’d be born into, and would have revealed Himself to me regardless of whether I was born in Cairo, Calcutta, Jerusalem, Peking, or the United States.”

Biblically, that response is true for any Christian. But, it leaves us open to the following challenge...

If God could save *you* in Cairo, then why hasn’t He saved the 840 million *Muslims* in Cairo? Or the 650 million *Hindus* in Calcutta? Or the 13 million *Jews* in Jerusalem? Or the millions of *Buddhists* in Peking? If you believe this answer about yourself, you must be one of the only people on Earth who could have been saved in these places.

This makes us seem arrogant at worst, and intellectually dishonest at best. Furthermore, our biblical response only begs the question, “Why does it *appear* like our environment determines our beliefs?” Well, the reason is because it does.

My wife Bertha grew up Catholic. She’s loved God since the age of 5, but as a Catholic she had trouble expressing it. She wanted nothing more than to have a close relationship with God. However, her family was Catholic. For the first 19 years of her life, because of her environment, she remained Catholic. So, within the confines of her religion, Bertha loved God the best that she could. When she wanted to talk to God, as a Catholic, she would pray to the saints and confess her sins to her priest, because Catholics don’t believe people are worthy of talking to God themselves.

When she was 19, Bertha went to a Protestant service, and the speaker criticized Catholicism. She was told that she didn’t need to use intercessors to communicate with God; she could talk to God herself. Though it made her upset to hear her religion criticized like that, she started reading the Bible and realized that the speaker she heard was correct. Bertha didn’t have to pray to Mary or to the saints. She didn’t have to confess to a priest. She could pray and confess her sins directly to God. She discovered, to her delight, that she could have a close relationship with God, and that He wanted a

relationship with her. Finally, her mind recognized the truth that her spirit knew all along.

My wife is but one example. As Christians, we believe that our spirit transcends our physical existence. Our spirit is the part of us that existed before we were conceived on Earth and the part that will persist after we die. Appropriately, our spirit is here on Earth with us, going through this life, guiding us from our birth to our death. It is the part of us on Earth that perceives God's will and knows right from wrong, the part that interfaces with God and senses His presence. Bertha's spirit was able to sense God's desire to know and interact with her personally, even while her religion said that wasn't true. Notice that as significant as her environment was, her spirit discerned truth beyond what her environment told her. This is true for us all. What we must do in our physical minds is muddle through the conflict and determine which "truth" is reality. For many, it is a life long struggle.

In his book, "Living Water", Chuck Smith shows that the Holy Spirit aspect of God is a person. The Holy Spirit has intelligence, a will, and emotion^{xiii}. Combine this with a parallel the bible draws between a human's spirit and the Holy Spirit of God⁴², and we can reasonably conclude that our spirit has intelligence, a will, and emotion as well. When you consider that our spirit's intelligence, will, and emotion transcend our physicality, it must follow that our spirit is our real self, since it exists beyond our physicality. That is why Bertha's "gut" told her one thing (i.e., "God exists and loves me") while her environment told her another (i.e., "If God does exist, he doesn't want to know me personally"). It turns out that our physical environment is often an obstacle to understanding spiritual truth.

Given the existence of her body and spirit, here is how Bertha's life might have played itself out in Cairo. Her spirit, finding itself in a body born in Cairo, would know the truth about God. Given the Muslim environment of Cairo, she would be forced to choose daily between the yearnings of her mind and the yearnings of her spirit, and express herself within the boundaries of Islam. The conflict could very well cause her to even doubt the existence of God. The doubt that *many* people have about God's existence is due to the inability of their environment to explain what their spirit understands. So, while the spirit yearns to worship God and the mind yearns for proof of God, the spirit can discern what is true about God and what is not, even in Cairo. If that spirit's ultimate desire is to worship God forever, then every truth that spirit finds will be clung to, in anticipation of seeing God after physical death. In Cairo, given her spirit's desire to worship God in a direct and personal way, Bertha might find have found herself living a suppressed life or even dying a martyr for aberrant beliefs. But, when the body finally died, her spirit would go up to be with God to worship Him for eternity⁴³.

Not all people have the desire to worship God, and not all people who have the desire act on it. Notice that Bertha's spirit has always yearned to love and worship God, that she has always worshipped Him best she could given her environment, and that this truth is what God used to win her soul.

⁴² 1 Corinthians 2:11 - "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."

⁴³ Hebrews 11:6 - "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to god must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

Now let's consider the flip side of this coin. What about "Christians" who have no desire to worship God? A spirit that does not yearn to worship God will not find fulfillment in God's truth on Earth, even living within the church. As it turns out, most spirits seek their fulfillment within themselves, by judging themselves based on their good works. This is reflected by the fact that practically every religion teaches that what you do determines your ultimate destination; you go to Heaven or Hell by *earning* it. Any doctrine where your destiny is something you earn is a doctrine teaching self-fulfillment. It just so happens that the preferred method for self-fulfillment in Cairo is the religion of Islam. In Calcutta, it's Hinduism. In Peking, it's Buddhism. In Jerusalem, it's Judaism. In modern America, the preferred method of self-fulfillment is having tolerance for all of the other modes of fulfillment. Lives of Christians may be freer in America than anywhere else, but the percentage of people born annually in America containing spirits seeking their ultimate fulfillment from God may not be any more or less than in Cairo or anywhere else. Therefore, while environment may determine your religion, it has little to do with your relationship God. The key is your spirit, and God knows who sincerely loves him, and who is just going through the motions determined by their environment. Sadly, most fall into the latter. As a result it's not clear how many Christians aren't actually seeking that fulfillment; it's also not clear how many Muslims or Buddhists are seeking it. Only God knows for sure. The supposed exclusivity of Christianity results because it is the only religion that *teaches* the truth that finding fulfillment in God and His goodness gets us salvation, and it is the only religion that teaches us that the reason salvation works is because Jesus died for our sins. Only a person who grasps this truth in their spirit can accept this truth in their flesh.

Why does God allow pain and suffering?

Q: If there is a loving God, why does he permit – much less create – earthquakes, droughts, floods, tornadoes, and other natural disasters which kill thousands of innocent men, women, and children every year?

Q: How can a loving, omnipotent God permit – much less create – encephalitis, cerebral palsy, brain cancer, leprosy, Alzheimer's, and other incurable illnesses to afflict millions of men, women, and children, most of whom are decent people?

Again, there is a knee-jerk Christian response: we have all broken God's law⁴⁴.

Therefore, the deaths are not of innocent people, since no one is innocent. However, while this response is Biblical, it only dismisses the question without answering it.

The real question is "How can God claim to love us when He allows all this death that only He can prevent?" The answer is that everyone dies, but God doesn't destroy anybody's spirit. As for where a spirit goes at death, that's determined by whether the spirit gets fulfillment from God or itself. For those spirits seeking ultimate fulfillment from Him, God has seen to it that any debt owed Him by the spirit's earthly life was paid for on the Cross⁴⁵. Whether or how people suffer or die physically isn't a question of God's love. Whether or how God makes it possible for people to enter His presence... *that's* a question of God's love.

⁴⁴ James 2:10 - "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."

⁴⁵ Romans 6:23 - "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

At this point, we've answered the question, but not strong enough. To the intellectual atheist posing this question, we are merely retreating to the only concept we have at our disposal that explains why God can let people suffer: it's only physical. However, given our perception of God in our lives and the fact that physical suffering does exist, what other explanation could there be? Referring back to Chapter 3, we can apply Occam's Razor: since we perceive God and there is suffering in the world, we must go with the simplest explanation consistent with our senses. Therefore, God exists and gave us a roadmap to Him called the Bible⁴⁶, which says that He offers everyone paradise after death⁴⁷, rewards His worshippers in proportion to their suffering⁴⁸, and everyone else according to their wrongdoing⁴⁹.

Q: How could a loving Heavenly Father create an endless Hell and, over the centuries, consign millions of people to it because they do not or cannot or will not accept certain religious beliefs? And having done so, how could he torment them forever?

Building on what we've said above, it's not a question of whether a person accepts certain religious beliefs. After all, even the demons know the truth⁵⁰ and they're going to Hell, too⁵¹. The question is whether those millions of people *chose* to have a relationship with God. If a friend ever asks you this question, then ask your friend how he feels about people who don't want a relationship with him⁵². Does he consider himself loving? What about people who don't have relationship with him, but are detestable in society's eyes⁵³? Would he consider initiating a relationship with such a person? What about someone who let him down⁵⁴? What about someone he knew was plotting to kill him⁵⁵?

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

⁴⁷ Romans 1:16a - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."

⁴⁸ Romans 8:16-17 - "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."

⁴⁹ Revelation 20:13,15 - "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds... And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

⁵⁰ James 2:19 - "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."

⁵¹ 2 Peter 2:4 - "...God did not spare angles when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment..."

⁵² Luke 23:33-34a - "And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'"

⁵³ John 8:3-11 (paraphrased) - "And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and... said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery... Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?' ... He straightened up, and said, 'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' ... they began to go out one by one... and Jesus said [to the woman], 'Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on, sin no more.'"

⁵⁴ Matthew 26:40-41 - "And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'"

⁵⁵ Matthew 26:48-50 - "Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I shall kiss, He is the one; seize Him.' And immediately he went to Jesus and said, 'Hail, rabbi!' and kissed Him. And

Would he event respect any person who could hurt him so much? Let alone love such a person! Well as it turns out, we've all hurt God in some respect, literally, if you consider Christ's suffering on the cross. But, God is so loving that He will let anyone come into His presence who yearns to worship Him⁵⁶, regardless of their sin. He even forgives their debt so they can come! Even if no one else ever gave them the time of day! That's real love. The ones in Hell are the ones who turned God down, because they thought they could find fulfillment in their actions or their minds. If your friend's quest for fulfillment is a quest to worship God, then he will eventually accept the gospel, and at death will enter God's presence to worship Him forever; if that is never his quest, then it will *never* happen. By the time he realizes his mistake⁵⁷, he'll only be choosing Heaven to avoid Hell, and then it will be too late. Just as the choice to fill one's self with God is forever, so is the choice not to. *God* will not be *choosing* to torment anyone. A person locked out of Heaven will be exactly where he chose to be... spending eternity trying in vain to fulfill himself by himself. Even if Hell were not called "the lake of fire", such an end would truly be torturous.

Q: If God is a loving Father, why does he so seldom answer his needy children's prayers?

The implication is that prayers don't appear to be answered any more than if God didn't exist. Or, if He does exist, it would seem that Christians don't get their desires any more than non-Christians do. The reason for this is that prayer may be used to get what we want, but that's not what it's for. That is why we *don't* get what we ask for.

When Jesus was on earth, He gave an example of how to pray⁵⁸:

“Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”

If we all prayed like Jesus told us, then every prayer would be answered in the affirmative. Christ's kingdom is coming. God's will is being done on Earth, as it is in Heaven. God gives us everything we need every day that we look to Him for it, even days we don't. God forgives us far more than we forgive others. God does not tempt us, but He does deliver us from evil when we let Him, even when we fight Him sometimes. A person who prays like this is a person who looks for his fulfillment in God. Someone who looks for self-fulfillment only gives God a list of needs and gets mad when they're not met. Even a selfless prayer to heal a loved one might prevent someone from being delivered from evil. To disregard such truth is to impose our own will on God. How arrogant we can be⁵⁹.

Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you have come for.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized him."

⁵⁶ John 4:23 - "But an hour is coming... when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers."

⁵⁷ Revelation 20:15 - "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

⁵⁸ Matthew 6:9-13

⁵⁹ I number myself with the arrogant at times.

God answers His needy children's prayers. But when His children's prayers are selfish and/or are not centered on God and His will, then God will often answer no. "No" is an answer, even if we don't like it.

Q: Why does the omnipotent God, knowing that there are tens of thousands of men, women, and children starving to death in a parched land, simply let them waste away and die when all that is needed is rain?

As we've already seen, a person's spirit either yearns to worship God for eternity or does not. For one who does, any circumstance in that person's life will tend to bring him closer to God. Hardships will make him more dependent on God, and he will be grateful for what God *does* provide⁶⁰. Interestingly, blessings do the same thing. Does that sound like a contradiction? Well, consider that to someone who does not yearn to worship God, hardships will make it look like God is not there (or doesn't care), and blessings will make it look like God is not needed. Once again, the result is not based on the condition of one's life as much as the desire of that person's spirit. So, since God's motivation is to have everyone sincerely worship Him, and circumstances make no real difference in a spirit's desire to worship Him, God has decided not to mess with earthly circumstances – for now – so much as to use them. God has affected circumstances here and there, administering the occasional miracle as it suits Him, but generally He leaves things alone, revealing Himself and His love in small personal ways that some people see and other people are blind to.

This brings us to the answer as to why God lets people "waste away and die": making it rain would make no difference. Am I saying that even with rain, they'll still waste away and die? Not exactly. Perspective is extremely important when considering the possibility that God is cruel. When you see a beggar on the street, do *you* give him money? It's been found that most beggars these days use the money they receive to buy drugs and alcohol. Notice that all it takes to shelter and feed these people is money, but look at what they do with it. They don't get fed and they don't get sheltered. It merely helps keep them in their situation, doing no more good than if you'd just kept your money. What does do good? Give the money to a homeless shelter or a soup kitchen, where anyone who wants food and shelter can get it. "Where's the parallel?" you ask.

If providing rain to a parched land would teach people of God's love for them, activating a yearning in their spirit to worship God forever, then I believe that God would do it. However, it does not. In general, either the people do not attribute the rain to God, or they don't associate the rain with His love. Instead, they associate any *lack* of rain with His anger if they associate rain with Him at all. The result is a pointless effort at trying to appease God's anger so that He'll make it rain for them. This reduces God to nothing more than the "rain god", and it produces a population that does not seek fulfillment from God, but seeks fulfillment from their own actions – worshipping a rain god via appeasement of his anger is nothing more than worship of one's own actions. When they die, these people's spirits will get their desire, to spend eternity trying pointlessly to appease God; an eternity like that would be Hell. Giving them rain does them no good, and God knows that.

⁶⁰ Job 13:15 - "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him."

It turns out that feeding people God's love is much more effective when it comes through another person. So, God sends out missionaries. Missionaries bring with them teaching about God's love, the Gospel, and, oh yes... food and shelter. Not everyone receives God's love as it is. They just allow the missionaries to talk, and then take advantage of the food and shelter. Those with spirits who have been waiting to hear of God's love will receive the Gospel and be grateful that God loved them enough to send them His word (much like the beggar who is grateful for the homeless shelter or the soup kitchen). For situations where showing love to a starving population will do real cosmic good, God often sends missionaries in lieu of rain.

“But, didn't you say earlier that spirits who yearn to worship God will grow closer to Him whether there is rain or not?” Yes, I did. “Then why even send missionaries?” God rarely works the same way twice. In one parched land, God will reveal Himself to a spirit through the sunshine, the rocks, and the occasional water-bearing cactus. In another such land, God will speak the Gospel to them through missionaries.

Why aren't Christians more righteous and obedient to God?

Q: Why are there literally hundreds of Christian denominations and independent congregations, all of them basing their beliefs on the Bible, and most of them convinced that all the others are, in some ways, wrong?

The reason every denomination is convinced that all the others are, in some ways, wrong is because all denominations are, in some ways, wrong. No denomination gets it right 100%. However, they all agree that Jesus is their Lord and Savior who died for their sins, and on that point, they are all correct. As for why there are literally hundreds of Christian denominations, the answer is Satan. The best weapon Satan has against church solidarity is church infighting. Refer to the section “Why Christianity” for a more in-depth discussion.

Q: If all Christians worship the same God, why can they not put aside their theological differences and co-operate actively with one another?

If Christians could put aside their theological differences and cooperate with each other, they wouldn't need Jesus. However, while true, this answer is too easy. The real question is why becoming a Christian doesn't remove all of the differences and strife we continue to endure, even in the church. After all, God is going to make us perfect when we're in Heaven; couldn't He have done it here first, instead?⁶¹ Someone who asks this question is really asking why God doesn't do things the way we want Him to. Here's the answer: a person who God saves is a sinful person who needs a savior. God doesn't change a person's physical nature. He gives that person's spirit acknowledgement and credibility. A starving spirit knows God when it meets Him; a starving spirit gains strength and courage from God to take control away from its sinful flesh. On the other hand, that flesh is still there and its desires and experiences never stop coloring the world in a way that causes the spirit grief and pain when it knows what's true yet can see no proof of it through those colors. That is why Christians can agree on the fundamentals of salvation, and yet do not agree on everything else. It's also why many people fall and some churches experience conspiracy and corruption.

⁶¹ Revelation 2-3 - See Table 1.

Church Name	Verses	Title	Description
Ephesus	Rev. 2:1-7	The Loveless Church	Hard working & patient, but doesn't focus on God and Jesus.
Smyrna	Rev 2:8-11	The Persecuted Church	Willing to suffer for Christ.
Pergamos	Rev 2:12-17	The Compromising Church	Faithful, but compromising in key areas.
Thyatira	Rev 2:18-29	The Corrupt Church	Loving, faithful, and patient, but tolerant of sexual immorality and idolatry.
Sardis	Rev 3:1-6	The Dead Church	Effective but superficial.
Philadelphia	Rev 3:7-13	The Faithful Church	Faithful in all things.
Laodicea	Rev 3:14-22	The Lukewarm Church	Knows the gospel, but has no relationship with God.
<p>Many atheists criticize the Church for its lack of solidarity, and we must acknowledge that it is true. Don't try to defend it. First of all it's indefensible. Second of all, even the Bible documents it. We need only show that contrary to negating God's love, our lack of solidarity actually confirms it though the mercy God showed by sending Jesus to die for even those sins!</p>			

Table 1 - The 7 Churches of Revelation

We have still left one aspect of this question unanswered: given their differences, why can't the different denominations work together anyway? That's a good point. I wish they could, too. But, people stick with what's comfortable. Based on my observations, the differences between any two denominations usually make the other denomination uncomfortable. One denomination uses the spiritual gifts wrong. Another puts an emphasis on worship but little emphasis on teaching. One preaches about money in each and every sermon while another says nothing about money to its own financial detriment. One ordains female clergy while another believes it's unbiblical. These are differences that make it challenging for any two Christians to get together at random and have it work. Even Jesus says that a kingdom divided cannot stand⁶². I thank God that Jesus won't found His kingdom until after God has purged the world of these differences, which brings me to my final response to this question.

By the time Jesus comes again to start His millennial reign, spiritual gifts will cease⁶³, and there will be exactly one church. Even though the modern Church won't put aside its differences, Jesus will. Notice how we've come full circle. Like I started out in answering this question, if we could put our differences aside now, we wouldn't need Jesus.

Q: Why, in a world filled with suffering and starvation, do Christians spend millions on cathedrals and sanctuaries and relatively little on aid to the poor and needy?

Guilty. As a group, we Christians are guilty as charged. This question has several aspects to it, each of which needs to be addressed separately...

⁶² Mark 3:24 - "And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 - "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away."

The first question to answer is why Christians have spent millions on cathedrals and sanctuaries. Well, it depends on the Christian, and there are generally two types. The first type is the Christian who loves God immensely, and believes that God deserves the best. We find this reason in the Bible as well⁶⁴, and it's true that God deserves the best of everything; it honors God when we give Him the best. The other type of Christian just wants everyone to see how pious he is⁶⁵. As a result, you could have two identical sanctuaries, both beautiful, both expensive. Depending on the heart of the builder, one glorifies God and the other does not.

The second aspect of the question is why Christians spend relatively little on aid to the poor and needy. Well, the honest answer to the question is that many Christians in this world are only "church" Christians. They go to their church, attend Sunday services, put their guilt money in the basket once a month, and then go on with their life from Monday through Saturday. It's a sad fact, but it's true. The reason is because these Christians don't understand the true message of the Gospel any better than an atheist. As this question demonstrates, it's often the atheist who understands the Gospel better! I'll tell you what; God's not happy with these "Christians", and you might be surprised if you saw what was really in their hearts. Christians are exhorted by Jesus to love, and many of us just don't do it.

I'll tell you what I'm doing at this time in my life. I'm attending a church with a building that's nice but not showy. Anything done that seems to be showy is done with the hope of bringing in people who need to hear the gospel. Furthermore, my church is my biggest charity, and I know where the money is spent. Besides running the church, some of my money goes to reach the community; some goes to help needy families who appeal to the church for assistance; some goes to missions throughout the world, where people are fed food and the Gospel. Sadly, not all Christians give, and not all churches spend their finances responsibly. It's a sad fact. However, it all goes to show how badly we need Jesus!

Q: Jesus' last words to his followers were "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. And, lo, I am with you always." But, despite this and to this date – some two thousand years later – billions of men and women have never so much as heard the Christian Gospel. Why?

One answer is that people aren't perfect. Another answer is that circumstances prevent every person from hearing the gospel. For example, much of the Arab world has deemed preaching Christianity illegal. For this reason, much of the modern Arab world will never hear the gospel. Does this invalidate Christ's Great Commission for us to preach

⁶⁴ 1 Kings 5:5a, 7:51 - "And behold, I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God... Thus all the work that King Solomon performed in the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things dedicated by his father David, the silver and the gold and the utensils, and he put them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD."

⁶⁵ Luke 21:1,5-6 - "And [Jesus] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury... And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, 'As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down.'"

the Gospel to all living creatures⁶⁶? Not at all. It only means that we are not perfect, but should strive for what Jesus wants regardless⁶⁷. In any case, God doesn't *need* us in order to reveal Himself to someone. If someone has a spirit yearning to worship God, seeing a beautiful sunset may be enough⁶⁸. If the objection is that Jesus is asking us to do something that he knows cannot be done, realize that obeying the entire Ten Commandments cannot be accomplished either, and God gave those rules to us, too. Therefore, this either *invalidates* both the Ten Commandments *and* the Great Commission, or it *validates* them both. As we've seen, the purpose of the Ten Commandments was as much to show our need for God as to show what would please Him. Likewise, Christ's Great Commission does the same. And just as God accomplishes in the Jewish law what we cannot, he also accomplishes revealing Himself where we cannot.

Does belief in God conflict with science?

Q: How can one believe the biblical account of the creation of the world in six days when every eminent physicist agrees that all living species have evolved over millions of years from primitive beginnings?

God can do whatever He wants, regardless of our conclusions. The fact that physicists' conclusions don't seem to jive with many theologians' interpretation of Genesis doesn't negate the fact that God did what He did, we're here, and Genesis says what it says. So, what gives?

In my opinion, I believe God could have created the world in six literal days, complete with light in transit from space, and fossils in the ground. That is one theory and God could have done it. Honestly, I don't know. Another thing God could have done is create the world in six literal days, complete *with* dinosaurs, and then *destroy the dinosaurs in the great flood*. That still would have required the creation of light in transit to Earth, but God could have done it. But honestly, I don't know. Another theory is that the earth really did develop exactly like scientists say, and each day in Genesis is symbolic of a different *era* on earth. It's certainly possible, but honestly, I just don't know. The pickle is that God appears like a liar no matter where we turn. Either Genesis appears literal but isn't, or God created fake fossils and light in transit to make it look like things happened that didn't. Which lie would you prefer God to tell?

I would like to propose one other possible explanation⁶⁹. When Moses wrote Genesis, he was being literal *and* the world was created over millions of years⁷⁰. I admit that I can

⁶⁶ Matthew 28:19-20 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

⁶⁷ Mark 16:15-16 - "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.'" Note that people are condemned for disbelief. However, ignorance is not disbelief.

⁶⁸ Luke 19:39-20 - "And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to Him, 'Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.' And He answered and said, 'I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!'"

⁶⁹ The purpose is not to start a movement, but to show that if there is one logical explanation, regardless of what it is, then we can have increased confidence that what God did makes sense, even if we will not know what that is in this life.

never substantiate this, but I believe that God showed Moses the creation of the world from His perspective, but at a level that Moses could comprehend. While I imagine Moses missed a lot of the details, I'm also convinced that Moses wrote down what he saw as faithfully as a he could, but from the perspective of a *witness*, not a scientist. Therefore, God created the world in six days (from His perspective), over millions of years (from our perspective), and Moses wrote a literal account of how he saw the history of creation unfold. Don't forget, scripture is God-*inspired*⁷¹, not God-*dictated* (except where noted "Thus saith the Lord...").

People who challenge the legitimacy of Genesis 1 often consider it common sense that the Bible is a fairy tale. However, if what we read is the closest Moses could come to what he saw, given *his* technological level, then the evidence people use to disprove Genesis is merely an explanation of what Moses didn't understand. It's not intellectually honest to acknowledge the level of technology that existed 3,000 years ago, and then criticize Moses for writing the Bible at the level we were at 3,000 years ago. It is true that knowledge has increased, and mankind has discovered that the universe didn't start exactly like a *modern* reading of Genesis implies. But, anyone who concludes that God doesn't exist because of this perceived discrepancy is basically using the design of the universe as proof that it wasn't designed, which doesn't make logical sense.

Q: Is it possible for an intelligent man or woman to believe that God fashioned the first male human being from a handful of dust and the first woman from one of the man's ribs?

I'm intelligent and I believe it, so it must be possible for an intelligent person to believe it. Consider this: is it possible for an intelligent man or woman to believe that God fashioned men out of monkeys over millions of years, when he could have simply done it out of available raw components in the blink of an eye? As you know, it's possible for intelligent people to believe that, too. The problem is that being intelligent doesn't prove that you're right, and being wrong doesn't make you stupid. However, once again, answering with the simple truth merely skirts the issue.

The assumption in this question is that God doesn't exist, and that intelligent people find logical explanations, not fantastic ones, especially when a logical explanation is forthcoming. That is certainly a logical premise and generally works. The problem is that when God does fantastic things, logic falls to pieces, because *we don't have access* to all of the information that needs to be considered. Are we therefore to discard what God really did, and make up an explanation for how we think He should have done it? The thing to remember is that no matter how God did it, He did it. Suppose it turned out that God actually used evolution to create Adam from monkeys, and that the primary

⁷⁰ Please note that I am not a theistic evolutionist. While I do believe that the earth was created over millions of years, I do not believe that God used evolution. However, that's only my opinion; He could have.

⁷¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

ingredient of the primordial soup was the "dust of the ground" that Genesis refers to⁷². As a Christian you'd be surprised because the church doesn't advocate that⁷³. However, what doesn't change is that however it was done, God did it; and no matter how we interpret Genesis, it's intended to describe what God did. If we agree on this general abstract point, then neither agreeing nor disagreeing on God's methods for creating the world isn't proof of anything.

Q: Is it possible to believe that the Creator of the universe would personally impregnate a Palestinian virgin in order to facilitate getting his Son into the world as a man?

First of all, since I believe it, it's obviously *possible* to believe it. Also, similar to the above question, whether or not God actually impregnated Mary is totally independent of *whether* we believe it. The question is whether we can prove it to be a historical fact; well, for a Christian we can. An ugly implication in this question is a challenge as to whether we really do believe it. The fact that we can point to the historicity of scripture, the customs of the times, and the absence of extra-biblical sources contradicting Christ's Immaculate Conception is all beside the point, and they are generally unacceptable as proof to an intellectual atheist. After all, we'll believe what we want whether we can prove it or not, right?

As it is, the challenge stands: do we really believe what we say? This is a no win challenge. The fact that Templeton lived life as a Christian with pangs of doubt and disbelief is meant to suggest that we may suffer from the same doubts and same disbelief in what we teach our children. Consider this possibility, that in the flesh, you do *not* believe in Christ's Immaculate Conception! In the flesh, you don't even believe that God created the world in six days (in any respect). But, it is your *spirit* that knows the truth, not your flesh. If you do feel those pangs of doubt, yet feel right about these facts at the same time, it's your spirit defeating your flesh. Remember that your spirit knows the truth when it hears it, even when your flesh doesn't like it⁷⁴.

So, what's the answer to this question? In general, it is not possible for your flesh to believe in these things. However, when exercise our faith, it's not our flesh that believes... it's our spirit. Applying Occam's Razor, it is more valid for us to proceed based on our spiritual senses than otherwise. An atheist's *inability* to sense God does not invalidate the truth and our ability to believe it.

Does God have a dysfunctional personality?

Q: The Bible says that "the Lord thy God is a jealous God." But if you are omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and the creator of all that exists, of whom could you possibly be jealous?

⁷² Genesis 2:7 - "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." According to Strong's Concordance, "dust" could mean clay, earth, or mud. I seriously doubt that Moses knew any Hebrew word for "primordial soup".

⁷³ I don't believe it either, but it's thought provoking, isn't it?

⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:14-15a - "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things..."

Templeton is correct that there is no living being of whom God is jealous, at least not in the respect he means. Templeton is implying that our “god” is insecure. When *we* get jealous, it is usually because we are insecure. For example, I recently saw a two year old girl watch her mother pick up someone else’s baby. The little girl immediately went up to her mother and squeezed herself onto her mother’s lap, next to the baby, in order to reassure herself that she still had her place in her mommy’s heart. She was jealous because she was insecure. When a mate sees his/her partner staring at another, jealousy flares up because of insecurity. God however is not insecure, precisely for the reasons the questioner lists: He’s omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and the creator of all that exists; no insecurities there.

Jesus answered this question in the tale of the Prodigal Son. A father watched with love as his son grew up. When his son asserted his independence, the father stepped aside. He let his son be the man he grew up to be. He surely missed when his son was a boy, but he believed good things were yet to come. But instead of becoming a real man, his son fell into gambling and drunkenness; he squandered his inheritance. The father not only missed the boy his son used to be, but he felt much sorrow at who that boy had become. That father lost his son, and the world had him. That father was jealous of that world, and he wanted his son back desperately, and would have done anything to get him back. In the end, the son did come back, and the father threw a celebration. Notice some things about this father. He was not insecure. There were no qualities within his son’s world that he wanted for himself. He simply wanted his son back, and would have died for him if it would help⁷⁵. This jealousy is not insecurity; it’s love. It’s the kind of love God has for us. It’s why He sent His son to die for our sins. He found a way to die for us to get us back. God must be pretty secure within Himself to accomplish the death and resurrection of His son, for the purpose of giving *everyone* a *chance* to worship Him forever in Heaven.

Q: Why would the Father of *all* mankind have a Chosen People and favour them over the other nations on earth?

Given what God has done, the Jewish people have played a very significant role in history. Through their faults, their foibles, and their strengths, God has provided salvation to all who will have it. Indeed, this makes the Jewish people very special to Him. Consider the following parallel. In both ancient and modern society, the eldest child is frequently given a special status in the family. Very often, the oldest child is like a third parent to the younger siblings. The eldest gets to be the first one to drive a car, go out on dates, and get married. We don’t mean for this to provide a status, but it does. That’s just how life works. Well, along with this status comes responsibility. When both parents die in a large family, who takes care of the younger children? The eldest. When the parents get old and need to appoint an executor of their will, who is usually chosen? Again, it’s the eldest child. And who benefits? Everyone else in the family! That’s how it works in life, and that’s how it works here, too. When God chose the Jewish people, He gave them a status similar to that of the eldest child⁷⁶. As such, they were given the

⁷⁵ We know this because the father represented God in the parable.

⁷⁶ Galatians 4:1-7 - "Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the

honor of producing a savior, which they did: Jesus. Finally, it was for the benefit of the rest of God's children, which is *all* mankind.

Q: Why would a God who is “no respecter of person” prohibit adultery and then bless, honour, and allow to prosper a king who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines?

This question is a reference to King Solomon, but the answer lies in his father, King David, who served as Solomon's role model for being a man. If we can answer the question for David, then we can infer an answer for Solomon. Referring back to the question about why God lets people perish in parched lands, the answer is very similar. Just as rain does not *start* a spirit yearning to eternally worship God, nor does a person's sin *stop* him from yearning to eternally worship God. When a spirit yearns to know God and worship Him, God will bless that person in whatever way is necessary to feed that spirit's needs. Those needs are defined in part by that person's physical situation, since a spirit is forced to live through a physical existence for the duration of its earthly residence. In David's case, the existence started as the child of an old man, a child no one believed in⁷⁷. It's true that David ended up proving himself by killing Goliath, but that lack of confidence (reinforced by King Saul for years afterward) may have wounded David for the rest of his life, causing him to look for his manhood in sex and women⁷⁸, much like men do today. I suspect that is why David had many wives⁷⁹.

Interestingly, the same situation that wounded David for life was used by God to show His power and to raise David up to serve God's purpose as king of Israel. When you actually look at David's life, and read his Psalms, you will not see a person who feels

fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Here's the connection: The Jews before Christ are likened to being a son of God, and therefore heir to God's promise of redemption. However, until Christ came, being God's heir was much like being God's slave because they were bound by God's Law. Since Paul's audience was primarily Jews who were born before the crucifixion, he reminds them that they individually were children of God in exactly this sense. However, now that Christ has come, people could now come to God as an adopted son, instead like a slave. With Israel being like a slave son, and the Church being like an adopted son, this essentially makes Israel the Church's older brother.

⁷⁷ 1 Samuel 17:12-19,28,33 (Excerpted) - "Now David was the son of ... Jesse, and he had eight sons... And David was the youngest. Now the three oldest followed Saul... Then Jesse said to David his son, 'take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves... For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting the Philistines...' Now Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, 'Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle...' Then Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth.' "

⁷⁸ 2 Samuel 11:2-4 - "Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' And David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house."

⁷⁹ 1 Chronicles 14:3 - "Then David took more wives at Jerusalem, and David became the father of more sons and daughters."

materially prosperous. He feels empty and alone⁸⁰. Any prosperity he considers is spiritual, and that he attributes to God. Should God have chosen someone with less weakness to be king? Should He have chosen someone who obeyed all Ten Commandments? Every person God has chosen to use (except Jesus⁸¹) has broken one or more of the commandments, often egregiously. Moses didn't trust God⁸². Noah was found naked and drunk by his sons⁸³. Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife⁸⁴. Jonah refused to preach God's love to Nineva, because he thought they should all go to Hell⁸⁵. I could go on, but I hope you get the point. When God says he is "no respecter of person" He is saying that He's going to do what He's going to do, even if that means accomplishing His will in spite of us.

Because God is "no respecter of person," accomplishing His will in spite of sinners often results in blessing those same sinners. If you don't think that's very fair, then realize that if God will bless a king on *Earth* who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, then imagine how much *more* He will bless in *Heaven* a man who made and kept a commitment to *one* wife. If you think this is a copout for the Earthly question, consider that if God really exists and the Bible says what it says, then this answer *should* be true.

Q: Why is the largest Christian church controlled entirely by men, with no woman – no matter how pious or gifted – permitted to become a priest, a Monsignor, a bishop, an archbishop, a cardinal, or pope?

Whether God would approve a woman to become part of the Catholic clergy I cannot say for sure. However, I can share the scriptural basis most of the Christian Church has for not permitting it. God has chosen to symbolically model His relationship to us using the relationship between men and women. The men represent God, and the women represent the Church. God tells men to love their wives like Christ loves the Church⁸⁶. He promises that His Son Jesus will wed His bride Jerusalem⁸⁷. Eve was created to be a

⁸⁰ Psalm 22:1-2 - "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; and by night, but I have no rest."

⁸¹ 1 Peter 2:21 - "...who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;"

⁸² Numbers 20:12 - "But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"

⁸³ Genesis 9:20-22 - "Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside."

⁸⁴ Genesis 20:2a - "And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.'"

⁸⁵ Jonah 4:1-2 - After God spared Ninevah from destruction, "... it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'"

⁸⁶ Ephesians 5:25 - "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;"

⁸⁷ Revelation 19:9, 21:9-10 - "And he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God...' And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, 'come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God..."

helper to Adam⁸⁸, like the Church is a helper to Christ. While I personally have no problem with women teaching men, one may find a logical scriptural difficulty in having a woman be the primary leader of a church.

The husband is held responsible by God for the spiritual decisions made by and for his family⁸⁹. The husband is the spiritual leader of his family. The husband and wife can divide responsibility of their family however else they choose, but it's the husband whom *God* ultimately holds responsible. Consider a woman acting as the senior pastor of a church. If her husband attends his wife's church, that would make her his spiritual leader at church, when he is supposed to be hers at home. In my opinion this can potentially create an imbalance that God doesn't intend, because no such imbalance exists between Christ and the church. The other option, having the husband attend another church, divides the couple where God has said they're one⁹⁰. I'm sure there are couples that can keep things in perspective and make such a relationship work, and I'm sure that their congregations receive their share of blessings from our Lord, but I don't believe it glorifies God when such an arrangement strains a marriage and potentially the wife's church. My personal choice is to only attend churches where the senior pastor is a man⁹¹, and I think that most Christians make the same choice.

Why is Christianity Reasonable?

In the previous section, Charles Templeton's first questions imply that one's religion is based more on one's place of birth than on one's ability to perceive truth. Since we cannot address the question by proving what's true, we addressed the question by assuming our religion was correct (i.e., our faith is a given), and then showing why Templeton's observation doesn't nullify it. But, there was an unspoken question that we did not address: why is it reasonable for us to continue in Christianity, when so many other people feel it is just as reasonable to continue *their* religion? What makes it reasonable to conclude that we're right and they're wrong?

In his question about Hell, Templeton asks how people can be sent there to receive eternal torment, just for choosing the wrong religion. One implication that we did not address is that people in other religions are simply trying to do what Christians have done: try earnestly to relate to a God who is not completely knowable. So again, if the intentions of different religions are the same, then why is it reasonable for us to conclude that we're right and they're wrong?

When Templeton asks why there are so many Christian denominations and why they can't put aside their theological differences, he is also asking this: how can we say Christianity is more reasonable than other religions when we can't even agree on what true Christianity is?

⁸⁸ Genesis 2:18 - "Then the LORD said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'"

⁸⁹ Ephesians 5:22-24 - "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

⁹⁰ Genesis 2:24 - "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."

⁹¹ Admittedly, this contributes to church division, but one day Christ will do away with all such division, and differences like this will no longer exist.

In almost every question is the implication that it is not reasonable to be a Christian. There is an implication that there isn't just one way to God, if He even exists. There is an implication that if God has provided a way to Him at all, then it's not reasonable to think that Christianity is the only one. Anyway, even if God has provided only one way to Him, can we really be so certain that *we* have found it? There are many people in this world who think they've found God, and the majority are not Christians. So, why is it reasonable to conclude that Christians are right and everyone else is wrong?

There are many ways to approach this question. One quality we can use to judge how reasonable it is to accept Christianity is its conspicuousness among all other religions. It is conspicuous for its persistence, its many forms, its notion of how good and evil determine our eternal destiny, and its history tracing from the beginning of the world to the end. As usual, this argument isn't a proof. However, it is a reasonable criterion.

The Reasonable Truth

As usual, we start with our faith. Assuming God exists as He reveals Himself in scripture, then Satan exists, too. Well, anything Satan can do to distract us from God, he'll do it. Just about the most effective weapon for Satan is to provide alternative religions to keep people from believing in God. For those who *still* believe in God, Satan's next line of offense should be to provide alternative religions that look God-centered but tend to move our attention away from the Gospel. Finally, for those God-centered religions that do embrace the Gospel, Satan takes advantage of human arrogance, causing conflicting sects and denominations within the Gospel-preaching church. If Satan can't keep us all from accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then at least he can keep us from banding together as a single body.

Watch how this multi-pronged attack works with God-centered religions. Not only is there still the one original religion that believes in God (i.e., Judaism), but there are now many. When you concentrate on the God-centered religions that exist today, you see that most cannot be true if any of the others are. For example, Christians in general believe that Jesus was the promised Jewish messiah; Jews don't believe the Messiah has come. A significant number of Protestants believe that once God forgives you, you're in His grace forever while Catholicism requires you to regularly confess your sins to a priest so you can *remain* in God's grace. Protestants believe that Jesus could forgive sins only because *Jesus was God*, but Jehovah's Witnesses believe instead that *Jesus was Satan's brother*. Protestants and Jews believe in one God, but Mormons believe that we can become gods when we die. Protestants believe that the Jews are God's chosen people because God planned for Jesus to be a Jew, but Muslims believe that the Arabs are the *real* chosen people and dismiss Jesus as simply a prophet⁹². As for the Protestant and Jewish populations, there are more sects and denominations than you can count; Baptist, Evangelical, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, etc. just within the Protestant population; Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, Reconstructionist, etc., within Judaism. This creates division that can be quite destructive to their supposedly unified cause, as everyone *tries* to be unified while simultaneously thinking each other to be wrong.

If this is what Satan would do, then the existence of all the religious beliefs within and without Christianity are evidence of Christianity's truth, yet intellectual atheists use this

⁹² They say Jesus is a prophet, but then have to reject all of His prophecies.

as proof of Christianity's falsehood. Once again, regardless of the side one is on, ones conclusion is based on what one already believes. Therefore, contrary to the implications in Templeton's questions, Christianity is reasonable precisely *because* of the number of religions and denominations that exist.

How to Reach Eternal Paradise

Christianity is conspicuous because of how it claims you get to eternal paradise: forgiveness of sins by repentance. Almost every single other religion in the world teaches that you reach eternal paradise by doing good things. Here are some of the most diverse examples:

- **Buddhism** - Deny yourself riches and be good to your fellow creatures and you will enter Nirvana.
- **Judaism** - Do good things and you will go to Heaven.
- **Islam** - Do good things in Allah's sight and you will go to be in paradise.

As far as your eternal destiny is concerned, religions mostly disagree on how good various actions are, and what constitutes the "paradise" you'll go to when you die. However, unless you're concerned about your Earthly piety or the part of Paradise you'll end up in, you can just spend your life doing universally good things, and you will end up in Paradise. You don't even have to know what religion is the "right" one, because "God" will see your actions, and you'll end up where all the good people go.

One problem I have with the philosophy of these religions is that people often become enlightened after doing a lot of evil. Where do *they* go? It depends on what matters more, the fact that you die a good person, or the fact that you did more good things than bad. I think Buddhism's answer is clearer than the other two example above, but the ultimate intention is the same: get people to be good and not evil. Since they all seem to agree on that point, I would expect God to be equally pleased with any good-centered religion you choose, unless being a good person isn't enough.

Christianity is unique because the amount of good you do is not the criteria for entering Paradise. The criterion is whether you have repented for the evil you *have* done on Earth. Since Jesus died for your sins, every sin you commit was bore by Him on the cross. Therefore, if you love God, you will do your best not to sin. Goodness still results, but your goodness doesn't get you to Heaven; your repentance does. This makes Christianity conspicuous, and hence worthy of consideration.

Let's tie this in to some previous points that we've made. If evil exists, then it's reasonable for it to result in multiple religions that appear to be at odds. But, if it turned out most religions *will* get you to "Paradise" because they all teach you to do good things, then the different religions aren't actually at odds with each other; ignorance of a religion's details doesn't negate how good you are. This implies that there is no evil intention behind having multiple religions, because such an attempt could not keep people out of paradise. Of course, even in Christianity, the existence of different religions doesn't keep people out of paradise, but it's not because the other religions are true. It's because anyone whose spirit desires to worship God eternally will somehow grasp enough *real* truth - and reject enough fallacy - before dying that they will end up in

paradise with God⁹³. What makes Christianity conspicuous isn't that multiple religions keep people out of Paradise, but that it shows them to be Satan's *attempt* at keeping people out of Paradise.

Christianity or Judaism?

There are some features that make Judaism and Christianity equally conspicuous. For example, they both claim the Old Testament, which gives them a history leading back to the beginning of the world. Because both religions also accept the prophecies of Daniel, they can also claim a history that will lead them to the end of the world. In addition, the fact that the Old Testament was still around at the fulfillment of its prophecies lends credence to its validity. For example, Daniel's prophecies indicate that at some point Israel would be a nation with a peace treaty and a temple. After the Jewish Dispersion and the destruction of the temple it looked to many like the prophecies were fake. However, Israel is once again a nation, with plans for rebuilding the temple, and attempts to sign a peace treaty with Palestine are ongoing. Since these prophecies are supposed to be fulfilled toward the end of history, it's only fitting that the Old Testament and the Jewish people will be around to see it fulfilled. No other religion can make a claim like that. Therefore, just from this, it's reasonable to conclude that either Judaism or Christianity are correct. But which one is it?

If Judaism has the correct perspective on God, then in my opinion, God's intent for how Jews should live lies somewhere between strict-conservatism and mild-Orthodoxy. Had I concluded that Jesus was *not* the Messiah, then that is how I would live. However, I do believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that my conclusion is reasonable. One reason is because there are no other religions competing with Judaism for the Old Testament as their primary religious book. However, there are several religions vying for the New Testament; Satan seems busier creating confusion and conflict in the New Testament religions because, in my opinion, Jesus was the Messiah that God promised the Jews. Furthermore, all of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament have been fulfilled by Jesus, or will be fulfilled when He comes to establish the kingdom promised to the Jews.

Therefore, though I was born a Jew, I am a Christian. One day, I believe that Christians and Jews will be one body because Jesus will come eventually to fulfill the prophecies that Jews have been waiting to see fulfilled for thousands of years. When it finally happens, and they see that it's Jesus, then Judaism and Christianity will find themselves in agreement.

Christian-Like Religions

There is a phenomena unique to Christianity, and that is the existence of several Christian-like religions that are contrary to Christianity. Some examples are the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Faith (i.e., name-it-and-claim-it)

⁹³ Religions based on doing good things make God impotent when God's role is very active: He sent His Son to die for our Sins, and sent the Holy Spirit to help us evangelize. Therefore, as Christians, *we* must be careful not to make God impotent by saying He *cannot* allow certain people into Heaven. Two examples: 1) Consider a Buddhist who never hears the Gospel. If he concludes that there is an ultimate consciousness that no person could ever be a part of, that this consciousness has a will for his life, is pained by his wrongdoing, and is worthy of being worshipped, then he will probably go to Heaven. 2) As Protestants, we don't think that Mormons worship the real Jesus... so what if that's the Jesus that someone rejects? When considering if someone is going to Hell, don't be too quick to judge!

Movement. Each is less than two centuries old. In my opinion, they only joined the confusion that was there already, so I dismiss those religions as being in the noise.

Catholicism is different. It claims a history going back to Jesus, but it changed around 200 to 400 A.D. adding rituals and customs never intended in the Bible. In its present form, there is only one Catholic Church and it has a single prominent leader, the Pope. Many Catholics don't understand their religion because their Catholicism is only a label, a custom, or just something to do on Sundays. Some Catholics take as symbolic what others take literally and few are corrected for it in church unless they choose to go into ministry. On the other hand, many Catholics take everything with a grain of salt. They know that God answers their prayers, not Mary. They know that God forgives their sins, not their priest. They know that God helps those He calls to resist sexual temptation. There are Catholics who feel close to God, even in their realization that they don't deserve such closeness. They also know that traditions and rituals are there to bring them closer to God, not move them away. In other words, in spite of what protestants consider to be unbiblical practices within the Catholic religion, a significant portion of the church does have a biblical faith. Yet, a significant portion of the Catholic religion is unbiblical, and it has done a lot of harm to the faith of many others. Modern day Catholicism is a religion that claims to be "unchanging", yet it changes with the times in order to avoid splits and conflicts. In my opinion, Satan has done a lot in the Catholic Church to distract people from God's will, and it's been effective.

Different Christian Denominations

Within protestant Christianity we have denominations that identify themselves by how they baptize, others by how they practice the Spiritual Gifts, others by the kind of songs they sing, others by whether their teaching is expository or topical. They are all protestant Christianity and they all preach the bona fide gospel of salvation, but you often wouldn't know it by listening to them talk about *each other*.

It's unfortunate that so much division exists within the church, yet I believe that different denominations can serve different purposes by reaching people that other churches can't reach. In that respect, division need not lead to conflict. However, conflict is there, and all of it is explainable if God exists and Satan is trying to keep the Church splintered.

Christianity is Just Too Conspicuous!

Christianity stands out for too many reasons to be ignored.

- Christianity has a unique explanation for the multiple religions in the world.
- Christianity has a history tracing itself from the beginning of history to the end (as does Judaism).
- If there is an evil force trying to confuse humanity with a multitude of religions, then it is more likely to thwart Christianity than to thwart Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism.
- Christianity has competing religions that have adopted Protestantism's *primary* book (i.e., the New Testament) as a *secondary* religious book⁹⁴.
- *Only* Christianity has competing religions that have adopted the *same* religious book (i.e., the New Testament) as their *primary* religious book.
- *Only* Christianity can explain the fulfillment of every messianic prophecy in the Old Testament.

⁹⁴ Similarly, Judaism has competitors that have adopted the Old Testament as their *secondary* book.

- *Only* Christianity has a multitude of denominations that do not identify themselves as a single body, which is explainable if Satan is worried about unity among Christians⁹⁵.

The conspicuousness of Christianity is either a result of complex human history or the Christian struggle between good and evil. The degree of conspicuousness would suggest that considering Christianity true is no less reasonable than chalking it up to complex human history. Therefore, anyone who uses the conspicuous nature of Christianity to disprove it, is doing exactly what he is accusing you of... concluding what one wants in spite of evidence to the contrary.

⁹⁵ There are different Jewish denominations as well, but Jews still stick together as a whole much more admirably than do Christians, implying that Satan feels more threatened by Christianity than by Judaism.

Chapter 5: Given our Christian Faith...

An Apologetic History of Evil

Evil Does Exist

When God gave us free will, He knew we would often choose evil. So, consider the following question. Once God allowed evil into the world, how much should he have let in? Should He have put a limit on it? Consider the existence of deserts. Should there be no deserts in this world? The world needs deserts or else our ecosystem won't work. Should God have prevented people from wandering into the deserts so that they would never live there, and not have descendants who would die of thirst? How about when people slash and burn an entire forest, then exhaust the soil underneath it, *creating* a desert where there once *was* a forest? Should God have prevented *that*? And what about the people forced to live there afterward? Should God prevent their pain? How much of their pain should He prevent? Without pain in this world, how would we know pleasure? Why does God let terrorists fly airplanes into skyscrapers? Or incinerate millions of His chosen people in a death furnace? Why did He let me cut myself today? At what point do you want God to stop the evil?

I'm not going to say that God allows these things simply to punish us. I'm not going to say it's because God only cares about our souls. I'm not going to say that everyone deserves to go to Hell, and any pain on Earth is nothing compared to it. As a Christian, I do believe these responses have some truth in them, but answers like these are too easy, and they minimize the real pain of people who are only guilty of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In any case, they don't completely answer the question.

There are several reasons why God doesn't protect us from the results of evil. One is because we *wouldn't* know pleasure if we didn't know pain; God wants us to know pleasure. Sometimes the reason is to get us to stop being selfish and to start looking to Him for our sustenance. Sometimes the reason is so we can earn treasures in Heaven. Sometimes the reason is purely causal, with no divine intention behind it at all; sometimes a desert is just a desert. However, no amount of evil can stop a worshipping spirit from ultimately coming to know God; evil is merely an obstacle to overcome.

Evil is a Part of God's Plan

In the beginning, there was no sin, and mankind was given a lush garden to live in. Then Adam sinned and mankind was banished to till the ground for survival. Life from then on was going to be harsh; for Adam, and for all who would come after him. In the end, all sin *will* be purged from the earth, and everyone who chooses to *will* live with God in a paradise more lush than Eden. Evil and sin are not forever, but their existence is a fact for now, and God has a plan for dealing with it.

Evil will be overcome

Committing evil tarnishes our spirits, and tarnished spirits cannot enter God's presence unless that evil is repaid; justice must be done. Mankind believes in justice; because we are created in God's image, God's demand for justice shouldn't surprise us. While it is up to an individual to repay a debt he has incurred, it is perfectly valid for the debtor to accept payment from another source. The problem is that no one can pay their own debt to God, let alone someone else's. So, God created an out. He decided that He would

become a person for a time, live a life of no evil, thus incurring no debt against Himself, and then pay our debt for us... if we want Him to.

When God came down to earth as a man, He came as Jesus. Now, being God allows Him to reside in Heaven (the Father part of the Trinity), as well as be Jesus on earth (the Son part of the Trinity). As the Father, God didn't want the Son's visit to be a complete surprise. So, He decided to show mankind why Jesus needed to come, as well as give us enough information to realize who He was when He arrived.

So, God chose Abraham (then Abram) to father a new people. God did not choose Abram because of his righteousness. It was because God had to choose *someone* to start Jesus' lineage. God could have chosen anyone; he chose Abram, and renamed Him Abraham. Over the centuries, God provided to Abraham's descendents a model with which to worship Him on earth, as well as a set of rules representing what it would take for someone to enter God's presence on their own merit. Since the set of rules would never be followed perfectly by anyone except God Himself (i.e., Jesus), God included a model for sacrifice that represented what Jesus' death would do for them one day. As time went on, God revealed His will to various people, making them prophets, telling them why Jesus had to come, when He would come, and what He would do. Because they were prophets, their status gave their writing credibility that got it included in the Holy Scriptures (known as the Old Testament). Then, Jesus was born, and did exactly as God promised: He died for our sins and rose from the dead so that those who truly want their debt repaid to God can have it done.

God could have chosen to do things differently, but He didn't. The method He chose was executed in a logical fashion to have the desired result. He "chose" a race of people to implement His will. Should that be prohibited, because God is the "Father of all mankind"? Certainly not! After all, God used Jesus' birth to save all mankind! The obvious objection is that not all mankind is saved. That is true enough, but it's only because not all mankind has decided they want to erase their debt with God, and that's because not every spirit truly yearns to worship God. However, the opportunity is offered to all.

These are the Facts

It is a fact that I have faith in God's existence. It is also a fact that the God I perceive hasn't done things the way I would have told Him to. I don't want suffering in this world. I don't want people to go to Hell. I don't want people disagreeing on who God is and whether He exists. I don't want Satan to exist. I would far prefer that we somehow experience only joy and goodness without ever having to experience pain or evil. The problem is that what I want is a paradox. Without pain, there can be no pleasure. Without evil, there can be no pain. Without free choice there can be no evil. Without God, there can be no free choice. However, I cling to the hope⁹⁶ that God does use all things for good⁹⁷, because it is the simplest explanation that acknowledges *all* of my senses.

⁹⁶ Romans 5:5 - "...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

⁹⁷ Romans 8:28 - "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Following are a series of facts; many that I wish were not true. They are based on observations that atheists and theists generally agree on. Atheists use these observations to poke holes in God and Christianity; Christians tend to gloss over them without any explanation. Such sticking point shouldn't be. Contrary to disproving God's existence, they are actually a result of God's existence. The point we need to get is that the truth isn't always pretty, but it doesn't change just for our sake. If you are going to witness effectively to an intellectual atheist, then you must embrace these truths and point them out with confidence.

Here are the facts of life, whether we like it or not.

- Demanding *proof* will keep you from *faith*, because you cannot *prove* what is only known by *faith*.
- Because God exists outside the universe and science can only prove facts *within* the universe, we shouldn't be surprised that God's existence is scientifically *unprovable*.
- Since we all want God to reveal Himself to us, it shouldn't be a surprise that God *did* reveal Himself, and that people recorded His revelations the best that they could.
- We shouldn't be surprised that a description of the universe's creation written 3,000 years ago seems unscientific.
- God doesn't ask, "What if I'd had a little longer to save that person's soul? What if I'd created that person in the United States instead of China?" No, God operates based on where a person *does* live and when the person *will* die.
- Since we want all people to end up in Heaven, it shouldn't be surprising that God told us how to get there, and kept to His plan.
- We should *expect* Satan to confuse mankind with alternatives to Christianity.
- We should *expect* Satan to instigate religions that resemble Christianity, but are far from it.
- We should *expect* Satan to instigate splinter groups within Christianity.
- We should *expect* modern day Israel to win all its wars (as it has), until the Tribulation.
- We should *expect* the Gospel story to reach back to the beginning of mankind, which it does: Adam and Eve.
- We should *expect* God's chosen people (the Jews) to persist until the end of history (despite Nazism and Islamic terrorism), which is what Judaism and Christianity both prophecy.

A person without faith will read these points, and will not be persuaded, and for good *reason*: he thinks mankind has come up with a religion that merely rationalizes the relationship between belief in God and the unpleasant observations of history. However, *reason* is a double-edged sword: while the consistency between religion and history is not *proof of God*, it is also not proof that mankind *made Him up*.

Whatever the truth is, people will believe what they want. As Christians, all we can do is tell the truth. You must have enough faith to leave the proving to God, because remember... He proved Himself to you.

Notes

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- ⁱ "A Brief History of Time", by Stephen Hawking, 1988, Bantam Books, p. 167.
- ⁱⁱ "The will to Believe" by William James, pulled from, "Reason and Responsibility", edited by Joel Feinberg, 1981, Wadsworth Incorporated, p. 94.
- ⁱⁱⁱ "Handbook of Christian Apologetics", by Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli, 1994, InterVarsity Press, p. 81.
- ^{iv} "Perspectives In Evolution," by H. Blum, *American Scientist*, Oct. 1955, Vol. 43, p. 595.
- ^v "A Brief History of Time", by Stephen Hawking, June 1990, Bantam, p. 145.
- ^{vi} "Entropy Consumption And Values In Physical Science," by R.B. Lindsay, *American Scientists*, Vol. 47, Sept. 1950, p. 378.
- ^{vii} "A Scientific Analysis of Genesis", Edward F. Blick, 1991, Hearthstone Publishing, p. 59.
- ^{viii} "A Brief History of Time", by Stephen Hawking, June 1990, Bantam, p. 147
- ^{ix} "Perfect Gibberish", by Carl Zimmer, Discovery magazine, (September, 1992, <http://208.245.156.153/archive/output.cfm?ID=110>)
- ^x "I am convinced of one thing: The Jewish people will not get another chance. There are only so many miracles that history can provide a people, and the Jews have had more than their share." "A Durable Peace", by Benjamin Netanyahu, 1999, Warner Books, p. xii.
- ^{xi} "The Case Against God", by George H. Smith, 1989, Prometheus Books, P. 126.
- ^{xii} <http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Essays/BluePete/God.htm#Epicurean>.
- ^{xiii} "Living Water", Chuck Smith, 1996, Harvest House Publishers, p. 15 – 17.