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This document is an approximate manuscript of a Sunday teaching series I shared at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Barrie, Ontario on September 17th, 24th, and October 1st, 2017. Audio podcasts and the "Pushback Questions" (counter-arguments to some of what was presented) are available at the homepage for the series: <http://westminsterpc.ca/event/does-god-even-exist/>. I'm thankful to several authors whose research and writing helped me bring together many of the insights for this series including Alister McGrath, Tim Keller, Mark Clark, Ravi Zacharias and C.S. Lewis.

MIND BEFORE MATTER

Does God Even Exist? – The One Question That Changes Everything ~Part 1~

“WHY ARE YOU READING THAT? GOD DOESN'T EVEN EXIST!”

I want to start this series by sharing with you a really awkward experience I had.

About 20 years ago I was on a subway in Toronto heading to or from one of my university classes. I was taking an undergraduate degree at the time. And the subway was packed. People were jammed in like sardines. I was in one of the seats, and people were crammed in all around me. It was standing room only. People were holding on to those straps and bars at the top of the subway car so they wouldn't fall over when the brakes came on. And it was absolutely quiet. The only thing you could hear was the clackety-clack of the subway car hurtling down the tracks.

So to pass the time I pulled out a little white baptismal Bible I had received when I was a few months old. I started reading it, minding my own business.

As I did so a man beside me—*right* beside me—started to get annoyed. “What is that?” he said in a loud voice. It was as if he was upset at something.

“Um, this?” I replied?

“Yes, that.”

“It's the Bible.”

“Why would you be reading that?!”

At this point he was getting louder. *And everyone on the train was listening in!* Needless to say I was feeling pretty awkward. I was a university student, minding my own business, just reading my Bible on the subway! “Um, well...”

“But it's not even accurate!” he announced. “It's not true. God doesn't even exist!”

I'm not even sure what I said next. He had shaken me up. I probably said something like, “Well, I *do* think that God exists and I find the Bible helpful.” He stopped pressing and I kept trying to read. But I couldn't. I thought to myself, “You... jerk!” (I wish I had more compassionate thoughts toward him like, ‘Oh, the Lord bless you, my brother and fellow child of God.’) But alas, I cannot lie! It jarred me.

Thinking back, that dreadful experience has always stuck with me. And even though it felt super-awkward at the time, I'm glad it happened. Why? Because it motivated me to know and be able to explain the reasons for my faith more fully.

Can you relate to that? Can you relate to wanting to better know and explain the reasons for your beliefs?

Well, if you'd like to better understand why people think God exists, then this series is for you. If you'd like to better defend your faith, then this series is for you. And if you're simply not sure about all of this stuff, but would like to learn more in a thoughtful way, then this series is also for you. And let me assure you, the answers matter. This question—Does God even exist?—is the one question that can change everything.

First, as promised, I think I need to start by dealing with something:

THE MYTH THAT SCIENCE AND FAITH ARE OPPOSITES

We live in a time when a lot of people think that science and faith are opposites. This comes out in the media, talk shows, and books like the well-known book called *The God Delusion* by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. In it he says, "Faith is like a mental illness, a great cop out, the excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence."¹

Of course, I think he's wrong. And I'm going to prove that he's wrong over the course of this series. But why do people think this?

HISTORY (MIS)REPRESENTED

One of the reasons people buy in to this supposed opposition is because we've been told it's always been that way.

Galileo Tortured?

We hear stories about famous scientists like Galileo and how he was forced to face the Inquisition for believing, like others, that the sun was the centre of the universe (and not the earth). We're told how he was persecuted, charged with heresy, put in dungeons, and tortured. But this isn't accurate.

Galileo was a practicing Roman Catholic. He was certainly critical of some of the church's views, but he was never charged with heresy, put in dungeons, or tortured. He was, for a while, put under house arrest, but was soon released and continued to publish books. He died of natural causes in 1642.

A Flat Earth?

Another story we're told is that the big bad Church taught that the world was flat and resisted scientific discoveries which said otherwise. Again, not quite.

¹ Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*. This quote is taken from a lecture he delivered in 1994.

The statements in the Bible about the “four corners of the earth” are not literal statements. In fact, many of us still use that expression today. We go to a concert and say there were people in attendance from the “four corners of the earth.” It’s an expression that means “from all over the earth.” Not only that, but in the Bible itself the prophet Isaiah refers to God being enthroned above “the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22).

Plus, many people, including the ancient Greeks, knew that the world was round way before Jesus was born. They knew how to interpret an eclipse, and they could see the tallest point of a ship on the ocean slowly descend over the horizon (and not fall over an edge) and circle back again.

SO WHAT’S THE REAL STORY?

A more accurate picture of history is that scientific inquiry came from a general curiosity with the natural world and even from Christianity itself. Since God had created this incredible, wonderful, complex world, many intelligent people in the Christian community felt compelled to study and understand it—and used the scientific method to help them to do so.

Johannes Kepler, the famous 17th century mathematician and astronomer spoke about the purpose of science: “The chief aim of all investigations of the external world,” he said, “should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God, and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics.”² What this means is that there was (and is) a *cooperation* between the scientific method and faith to better understand God’s wonder-filled world.

Let me share with you a few names of very famous scientists, all of whom believed in God, and most of whom were Christians: Galileo, Kepler, Pascal, Boyle, Newton, Faraday, Babbage, Mendel, Pasteur, Kelvin, and Clerk-Maxwell.

Speaking about how science and faith have been falsely pitted against each other, Oxford professor Alister McGrath says this: “The idea that science and religion are in perpetual conflict is no longer taken seriously by any major historian of science.”³

Along the same lines, Colin Russell, Emeritus Professor of History of Science and Technology, says, “The common belief that... the actual relations between science and religion over the last few centuries have been marked by deep and enduring hostility... is not only historically inaccurate, but actually a caricature so grotesque that what needs to be explained is how it could possibly have achieved any degree of respectability.”⁴

I wonder why some people would want to perpetuate this false opposition? Hmm.

² Johannes Kepler, *Astronomia Nova De Motibus*.

³ Alister McGrath. *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 87.

⁴ “The Conflict Metaphor and Its Social Origins,” *Science and Christian Belief* 1, no. 1 (April 1989), 3-26.

But with respect to how people think today, what are other reasons why some people consider science and faith to be opposites?

Let me share three more reasons.

1. MANY PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND WHAT SCIENCE ACTUALLY IS

Here's a definition by Michael Ruse, a respected philosopher of science. He says that science "by definition deals only with the natural, the repeatable, that which is governed by law."⁵

In other words, science deals with what you can physically measure in the natural world. Therefore, a true scientist may observe nature and conduct experiments, but isn't really equipped, by the proper methods and instruments of scientific inquiry, to say whether God exists or not.

Harvard professor Stephen Jay Gould is a celebrated evolutionary biologist, paleontologist, and historian of science. He speaks about this very issue when he says that "Nature just is" and "we cannot use nature for our moral instruction or for answering any question within the magisterium of religion... To say it for my colleagues and for the umpteenth millionth time, science simply cannot, by its legitimate methods, adjudicate the issue of God's possible superintendence of nature. We neither affirm nor deny it. We simply cannot comment on it as scientists."⁶

What he's saying is that true science tries to measure and understand the natural world. Since God is non-physical—i.e. spiritual—and can't be measured and observed with scientific instruments, scientific methodology simply cannot draw conclusions about God's existence, or even about morality (what is right and wrong).

2. MANY PEOPLE HAVE STARTED TO THINK THAT THE WORD "SCIENCE" EQUALS "TRUTH"

Over time, people start to give meaning to words that were never intended to be there in the first place. That's what has started to happen when people equate the word "science" with "truth."

Here's a more helpful way to think about what "scientific truth" means. "Scientific truth" is what the majority of scientists *currently* think. That means scientific truth changes as the scientific community discovers more. For example, at one time it was thought that two criteria needed to be present for a planet to support life. But as more research was done, the number two grew to ten, then twenty, then fifty. Here's another example. Not too long ago researchers said that

⁵ Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1982), 322.

⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, *Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 195.

babies should get off of breastmilk as soon as possible because baby formula was much better for their health. But then that changed. As more research occurred, the consensus reversed.

So it's misleading to say that the word "science" equals "truth." "Scientific truth" is really just what the majority of scientists *currently* think.

3. WHAT A LOT OF PEOPLE CALL "SCIENCE" ISN'T ACTUALLY SCIENCE. IT'S A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING REALITY CALLED "MATERIALISM"

This last point makes me think of a scene in the Jack Black movie *Nacho Libre*. At one point, Black's wrestling mate confesses that he doesn't believe in God. He says he only "believes in science." The implication is that only scientific inquiry can tell you what is true and real. But this isn't science. It's a way of understanding reality called "materialism" (sometimes also called "naturalistic materialism.")

What these people are saying is basically this: "If I can't see it or measure it, it's not necessarily true or real."

In response to this, I say two things: First: It isn't true scientific methodology (see above). Second: No one actually lives that way. Here's why.

You can't see or measure the love you have for a child or friend, but it is real and true. It changes lives. You can't see or measure guilt or forgiveness or joy, but they are still real and true. They change lives. So to say, 'If I can't see or measure it, it's not real or true' is to assert that your own senses are the only gauge of reality. It's like you're an investigator at the scene of a crime and you'll only accept finger prints as legitimate evidence. So immediately, you dismiss the testimony of credible eye witnesses; you dismiss any other non-forensic clues already in the room; and you even dismiss exploring the motives of various potential suspects. Before you even start, you're limiting your perspective.

The same is true for materialists. They're limiting their perspective before they even start. A person who thinks this way would hear about a potential "miracle" and tell you that it didn't really happen right out of the gate. Why? Because it can't be measured and doesn't fit with what they already think they know about their interpretation of reality. But a true scientist would study the evidence, and then observe (a) that there is either a measurable explanation, or (b) that in the absence of a measurable explanation, something may have happened which we simply can't yet explain.

So what a lot of people call "science" isn't actually science. It's a way of understanding reality—a philosophical outlook—called "materialism."

[Materialists need to answer where they think nature and physical matter came from in the first place, especially since theorists say that all matter *and even time itself* came into being at the Big Bang, but that's a topic for another time.]

SO, ARE SCIENCE AND FAITH OPPOSITES?

No, they're not. To summarize:

- Recently there has been a (mis)representation of history that plays up the idea that science and faith have been at war with one another. (Hmmm, I wonder why.)
- Many people misunderstand what science actually is.
- Many people have started to think the word "science" equals "truth" (but "scientific truth" really just refers to what the majority of scientists *currently* think).
- And what a lot of people call "science" isn't actually science. It's a way of understanding reality—a philosophical outlook—called "materialism." It isn't actual scientific methodology, and it limits one's perspective based on a pre-conceived notion of what is "true" before they even consider all the evidence.

LOOK TO THE STARS

Over these three weeks I'm going to introduce you to three of the main evidences for the existence of God. Respected Philosopher Alvin Plantinga thinks there are more than twenty good evidences, but here I'm going to focus on three that I think are particularly compelling. And I also feel that they'll get stronger, meaning that with each passing week, I think these arguments for God's existence will get more and more compelling.

So this week I'm talking about the argument from the stars—also called the argument from cosmology.

SOMETHING CAN'T COME FROM NOTHING

We need to start with a very important idea: *That something can't come from nothing.* That for something to exist, it needs something else to *cause* it to exist. In other words, something can't just appear out of nothing, right? A baby doesn't just appear. Two people get together and—well, you know what happens (wink, wink)—and a baby arrives nine months later. Or if there is a loud knock at the door, it didn't just happen—something must have *caused* that knock. We could also call it 'cause and effect.'

When it comes to the universe, for many years, people just didn't know how it started. Some said that God must have started it because the Bible says so. And others felt that it had just always been there—it *had* no start. Stalemate.

But that all changed in 1929 when Edwin Hubble, living in California, started looking through a massive telescope, further than anyone else had seen before. He saw incredible things, and

galaxies moving away from each other in this huge, huge universe. So what was going on? A theory gained momentum called the Big Bang Theory—that our universe started in a big bang, a massive explosion, 15 billion years ago. In other words, all matter—what you can see touch, feel, and even space, energy and time itself—has a birthday.

Now here's the key evidence. Thinking back to the idea that for something to exist it needs something else to cause it to exist, what *caused* the Big Bang? And it's also important to remember this: All matter came into existence at the Big Bang. So prior to that moment 15 billion years ago, nothing material and physical existed. So what *caused* the Big Bang? I think that the evidence points toward an invisible Mind. And that invisible mind is God.

So how do people respond to this? There are a few different ways.

JUST NOT SURE

First, people who are adamantly committed to atheism sometimes simply say they just don't know. And I respect that. I think it goes against the evidence, but I respect it when someone says they just don't know.

THE NOTHING HYPOTHESIS

Second, some people adhere to something called the "nothing hypothesis." They simply say that nothing existed before the Big Bang. They can't explain it. But they say nothing caused it, and yet it still happened. But this makes absolutely no sense, and again, goes against scientific methodology. It's like you getting hit in the head with a bat, and your friend says, 'What caused it?' and you respond 'Nothing.' It makes no sense, and you still have a huge bruise on your noggin.

A CREATOR

A third way people respond—which is the way I respond, and also the way that many serious scientists respond—is by saying that the Big Bang points to a divine Creator God.

Frances Collins is an award-winning scientist who mapped the human genome. He says this:

"The Big Bang cries out for a divine explanation. It forces the conclusion that nature had a defined beginning. I cannot see how nature could have created itself. Only a supernatural force that is outside of space and time could have done that."⁷

⁷ Frances S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 67.

Oxford mathematics professor Dr. John Lennox has said that “the more we get to know about our universe, the more the hypotheses that there is a Creator... gains in credibility as the best explanation of why we are here.”⁸

Richard Swinburne, the British philosopher and emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Oxford, writes this in an essay: “The most general phenomenon that provides evidence for the existence of God is the existence of the physical universe for as long as it has existed... This is something evidently inexplicable by science.”⁹

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED ...

With this in mind, let’s read Genesis 1:1-3 (NIV):

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Many of us have read those lines from Genesis many times. But we read it in a whole new way when we learn how the argument for God’s existence from the stars—from cosmology—confirms it. Let’s hear it again:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

THE ASTRONOMICAL EVIDENCE

With that fundamental passage in mind, this is what astrophysicist Robert Jastrow says:

“Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements and the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same; the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy.”¹⁰

The first evidence of God’s existence that we’ve talked about today is that something can’t come from nothing. Something—our universe and world—had to come from somewhere. A *mind* has to create it—a mind that is outside of physical matter, space, and even time itself (all of which were created at the Big Bang).

⁸ This is quoted in various places, including: Eric Metaxas, “Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God.” Published in *The Wall Street Journal*, December 25, 2014. See also his essay about this subject called “Challenges from Science” in: Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith we Defend* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

⁹ This quote is from Swineburne’s yet-to-be published essay. It can be found online here:

http://users.ox.ac.uk/~orie0087/pdf_files/General%20untechnical%20papers/The%20Existence%20of%20God.pdf

¹⁰ Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 107.

TOO RATIONAL NOT TO BELIEVE

Just this past year I was talking with someone about Christianity and he told me he was an atheist. He said he was “too rational” to believe in God. I told him that as a pastor I was obviously a Christian and that I was also a very rational person. In fact, the more I look at the evidence I’m too rational *not* to believe in God.

I don’t have enough blind faith to be an atheist.

I realize that I’ve said a lot in this opening part of our series. If you’d like to review it, you can listen to the podcast at WestminsterPC.ca under ‘messages.’ And maybe you’ve had other questions pop into your mind as we’ve gone along. To try and anticipate that, I’ve published a few “Pushback Questions” (counter-arguments) that go along with this message. You can find them at WestminsterPC.ca under blogs. For Part 1 they include these two:

1. “If ‘something can’t come from nothing’ who (or what) created God?”, and
2. “Doesn’t the Big Bang theory contradict what Genesis says about how long it took God to create everything?”

If you’re at all curious, I think you should check them out.

A WORD FROM STAR TREK

Let me close Part 1 with this thought: Stanley Grenz wrote a book called *A Primer on Postmodernism*. In it he says that in the original *Star Trek* series, made in the 1960’s, there’s next to no religion. The reason for that was because it was supposed to be about the future, and people assumed that as time when on there would be less faith and less religion. So they didn’t really include many references to God.

But as the series went on—in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—they realized that the more we learned about science and the universe the *more* reasons there were to believe in God, not less. So, all of a sudden, you start to see more faith and belief in the series.

In Part 1 I’ve explained how the supposed war between science and faith is mostly a myth, and also that when we look at the universe and where it came from, something can’t come from nothing. The idea of cause and effect also applies to the universe. The first moment in our universe is perfect described in the first words of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”

So as we journey through this new series called “Does God Even Exist?”, I hope you journey with me as we grow and learn together—about both faith *and* reason—in God’s wonderful world.

GOD, THAT'S BEAUTIFUL

Does God Even Exist? – The One Question That Changes Everything ~Part 2~

“GOD, THAT'S BEAUTIFUL”

In September 2014 my dad Eric was diagnosed with a long list of cancers. They were too big and too aggressive to do anything about. At first they gave him 2 years to live, maybe; then one; then perhaps 6 months. He lasted two. He died in November 2014.

I don't say this because I'm special. You and I both know that many of you have experienced the death of someone you care about deeply. And if you're like me you'll think back to conversations you had. Certain moments will stand out. And you can probably remember an incredible amount of detail.

One of those times was in October 2014. My dad and I were sitting out on the porch at the home where I grew up. It was just the two of us. It was a particularly cool autumn day in Muskoka. And as we sat there—not talking about anything much in particular—it started to snow, ever so slightly. My dad was wearing a black North Face jacket, and he had a red plaid blanket over his lap. We just sat there watching some lightly falling snow.

After a few moments of silence, my dad, gazing into the air at the snow, with a backdrop of yellow, red and orange leaves, said, almost in a whisper, “God, that's beautiful.”

He knew he was seeing the first snowfall for the last time. When someone usually starts a sentence with “God” in our troubled world, they are usually about to take his name in vain. But with my dad that day, he wasn't doing that. He was commenting on God's world, on how wonderful it was—and is—and how sometimes we just can't help but be captivated by it.

HAD TO COME FROM SOMEONE

So why am I saying all of this today? Because I think my dad's words, as he looked at that first autumn snowfall, and said the words, “God, that's beautiful,” said something profound that, on a deep, deep level, all of us know. And that something is this: That the *intricate* beauty, the *unparalleled* beauty, the *indescribable* beauty of our world had to come from someone. And that someone is God.

How many of us have watched a sunset or sunrise *and thought the exact same thing?*
 How many of us have experienced the birth of a new child *and thought the exact same thing?*
 How many of us have laughed with friends in our living room *and thought the exact same thing?*

How many of us have wandered through the woods *and thought the exact same thing?*
 How many of us have stared at the stars *and thought the exact same thing?*

“God, that’s beautiful.”

NOT TO COMPETE, BUT TO ENRICH

Right now we’re in the middle of a series here at Westminster called “Does God even exist? – The one question that changes everything.” We can talk about Jesus, the Bible, progress, peril, world problems, and whether there’s a reason for your life, but underneath all those topics is a large, underlying question: Does God even exist? So that’s what we’re exploring.

If you’d like to better understand why people think God exists, then this is for you. If you’d like to better defend your faith, then this is for you. And if you’re simply not sure, but would like to learn more in a thoughtful way, then this is for you. And let me assure you, the answers matter. This question—does God even exist?—is the one question that can change everything.

Last week, for Part 1, I started by dispelling the myth that science and faith are opposites. I talked about how many people today have misrepresented actual history, and have embellished the idea that the church and the scientific community have been at each other’s throats for centuries. I also explained what science actually is (and what it isn’t). In fact, just this week, I was procrastinating on Twitter, and came across these words by Oxford professor Alister McGrath: “Science and faith come together, not to compete but to enrich. Together they present an extended and amplified vision of the way things are.”¹¹ That’s a good word related to what we talked about last week.

From there I shared with you an argument for the existence of God. It was the argument from the stars (or cosmology). I won’t review it this morning. So if you want to review it, or if you missed it, you can find it on the church’s website. And you’ll also find the first two “Pushback Questions”—these are popular challenges to the arguments I made. I answer them in blog form, so you can find them on the website as well.

A DIVINE DESIGNER

Today we move to a second argument. It’s the argument from design. Last week was the argument for God’s existence from the stars (or cosmology), and this week it is from design. And as I said in Part 1, I think that each week builds on the previous week. So I think that each argument gets more and more compelling as the weeks go on.

In short, the argument goes like this: “God, that’s beautiful.” But since that probably needs some more explanation, let me go a bit deeper!

¹¹ Alister McGrath, tweet on September 19, 2017. @alisteremcgrath

The argument from design is that the universe, world and humanity are so perfectly designed, complex and beautiful at the same time, that they points to a divine Designer—to God. In fact, the complexity and beauty of the universe and world are so compelling, that they scream out against any argument which suggests we are here by chance and by a stroke of randomness. Theoretical physicist Paul Davies says that “the appearance of design is overwhelming.” Let’s look at the specifics.

LESS THAN ONE MILLIONTH OF A SECOND

Last week we explored the idea of the Big Bang theory—that the universe began with a large explosion a long time ago. Even in this moment, there was incredible design that suggests a divine Designer. According to astrophysicists, four fundamental forces are needed for the universe to exist: gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. All four were determined less than one millionth of a second after the Big Bang. Change the smallest detail, and nothing exists, including the stars!

In an article titled “Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God,” Eric Metaxas writes, “Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth’s surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.”¹²

Building on these incredible realities, we find more complexity and beauty when we look closely at life on earth, and how there is intelligent, sophisticated information packed inside every living thing. Think of an amoeba. There is enough intelligent, sophisticated information in one of them to fill 30 encyclopaedias. (I know many of us don’t use encyclopaedias anymore, but you know what I mean.) Frances Collins, an award-winning scientist who mapped the human genome calls this “the language of God.” That’s how powerful the evidence of design is.

So our key question is this: Where does the evidence point? The evidence points to a universe that has been designed with intelligence and sophistication. It is fine-tuned by a divine Designer, by God.

POPULAR RESPONSES

So how do people respond to this? It’s important to look at what people say because their arguments and pushbacks help define what we’re saying, and whether or not it’s truly compelling.

¹² Eric Metaxas, “Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God.” Published in *The Wall Street Journal*, December 25, 2014.

you played poker every single hour of every single day of your life and every single time you were dealt a royal flush... *forever!*

Eric Metaxas writes, "Doesn't assuming that an intelligence created these perfect conditions require far less faith than believing that a life-sustaining Earth just happened to beat the inconceivable odds to come into being?"¹⁵

Nevertheless, one way people respond to this idea that our universe and world was made with incredible, astronomical sophistication and supposed intelligence...is by chance—even though, as we've seen, it's wildly unlikely, not where the evidence points, and is a mathematical probability of virtually zero.

BUT WHAT IF WE'RE IN A "MULTIVERSE"!

A second way people respond to this idea that the universe and world bear the marks of such sophistication and intelligence is that maybe there isn't just one universe. Maybe there are tonnes and tonnes of universes, and we just happen to be in the one that has all this design, intelligence and sophistication. This isn't new. It's called the "multiverse theory."

Here's the main problem with that. It might sound good—but *there's absolutely no evidence*. There's none. What we need to do, is look at our universe—which is all we can observe—and ask where the evidence points. It takes more blind faith to believe in many universes (for which there is no evidence), than it does to believe that our universe was designed by a divine Designer.

Responding to this multiverse theory, cosmologist Edward Harrison says this:

"The fine-tuning of the universe provides *prima facie* evidence of deistic design. Take your choice: blind chance that requires multitudes of universes, or design that requires only one... Many scientists, when they admit their views, incline toward the teleological or design argument."¹⁶

PSALM 111 AND THE PHYSICS LAB

A third way people respond to this idea that the universe and world bear the marks of such sophistication and intelligence that it must have been designed by a divine Designer, is to say Yes. Yes, there must be a divine Designer.

I want us to look at Psalm 111. It invites us to praise God and *marvel* at what he has done—at how incredible his creation is. It interweaves not only God's moral goodness and faithfulness to his people, but also the majesty and wonder of the world he has made:

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Edward Harrison, *Masks of the Universe* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 252, 263.

Praise the Lord.
 I will extol the Lord with all my heart
 in the council of the upright and in the assembly.
 Great are the works of the Lord;
 they are pondered by all who delight in them.
 Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
 and his righteousness endures forever.
 He has caused his wonders to be remembered;
 the Lord is gracious and compassionate.
 He provides food for those who fear him;
 he remembers his covenant forever.
 He has shown his people the power of his works... (Psalm 111:1-6a)

There are so many passages in the Bible that invite us to marvel at the beauty and intricacy of what God has made. But one of the reasons I like to focus on this one from Psalm 111 is because of something James Clerk-Maxwell did. He's a famous scientist from history. Above the door of his famous Cavendish physics laboratory, he had carved the words from verse two in Psalm 111: "Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them." One of the reasons I like that verse is because, I think, it suggests that the more we delight in God's world, and the more we ponder it, the more we are drawn back to the incredible works of God, and the very God himself who made them all in the first place.

ATHEIST CONVERSION

Anthony Flew was a British philosophy professor, and also one of the world's leading advocates for atheism. In 2004 he announced that he was no longer an atheist. He had become a theist. He said that, looking at the fine-tuning of life, biologists' investigation of DNA "has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements needed to produce [life], that intelligence must have been involved."¹⁷

STEPHEN HAWKING: "I THINK THERE ARE RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS"

And then this. One of the biggest thinkers in recent history is Stephen Hawking. He's a theoretical physicist and the Director of Research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology within the University of Cambridge. (Try putting that title on a small name plate!) In his book *A Brief History of Time*, while thinking about the sophistication and seeming intelligence implanted in our universe, he writes this:

"If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in 100 thousand million millionths, the universe would have re-collapsed before it ever reached its present size into a hot fireball. The odds against a universe like ours

¹⁷ Quoted in: Scott Cooper, *I Don't Want to Go To Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 96.

emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. I think there are religious implications.”¹⁸

He thinks there are religious implications. And so do I.

“GOD, THAT’S BEAUTIFUL”

As I think back to my dad and me, sitting on that chilly porch in Muskoka, watching the first autumn snowfall, and him saying, “God, that’s beautiful” just a month before he died, he summarized our entire argument for the existence of God. It’s the argument from design, that mounting evidence, also from the scientific community, which confirms that the Bible teaches, that the universe, world and humanity are so perfectly designed, complex and beautiful at the same time, that it points to a divine Designer—to God.

“God, that’s beautiful.”

How many of us have watched a sunset or sunrise *and thought the exact same thing?*

How many of us have experienced the birth of a new child *and thought the exact same thing?*

How many of us have laughed with friends in our living room *and thought the exact same thing?*

How many of us have wandered through the woods *and thought the exact same thing?*

How many of us have stared at the stars *and thought the exact same thing?*

“God, that’s beautiful.”

Last week we explored the argument for God’s existence from cosmology. Today we explored an argument for God’s existence from design. Next week we explore a third argument as we bring this short series to a close. And I think it’s the most compelling argument of all.

So as we journey through this new series, “Does God Even Exist?”, I hope you journey with me as we grow and learn—about both faith *and* reason—in God’s wonderful world.

¹⁸ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 121-122.

THE MAKER OF MORALITY

Does God Even Exist? – The One Question That Changes Everything

~Part 3~

I WILL WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS

Today we're going to start right out of the gate with a powerful passage from the Bible—from God's word—which speaks directly to the teaching series we're currently in. It's from the book of Jeremiah. And just to get us all on the same page here's some background.

God's people—the Israelites in the north and the Judeans in the south—were undergoing a horrible upheaval at this point in history. A foreign nation had come in and destroyed both, including their beloved temple in Jerusalem. When we talk about things like this from the ancient past they can seem distant. But just imagine someone coming into *our* country and uprooting *our* families and friends from their homes and destroying *our* churches and then marching many of *us* off to live as shame-filled losers in a country not our own. It would be devastating.

In the middle of this brutal reality, God spoke this word to this prophet Jeremiah. It's from chapter 31, verses 31 to 34, and includes hope for the future and the kind of special relationship he will have with his people, even though what they're experiencing is bleak:

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.* I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34 NIV, emphasis added)

Even though all seems lost, God speaks of a day when he will put his law—meaning his moral law, a deep and God-honouring sense of right and wrong—*inside* his people. God will have tattooed it *on their hearts*. In this sense, it will seem like they just naturally and intuitively know right from wrong.

With that in mind, today is the final instalment of a series called "Does God Even Exist? – The 1 Question That Changes Everything." It's my hope in this series that together we can grow and learn—about both faith and reason—in God's wonderful world.

If you'd like to better understand why people think God exists, then this series is for you. If you'd like to better defend your faith, then this is for you. If you're simply not sure, but would like to learn more in a thoughtful way, then this is for you.

In Part 1 we dispelled the myth that science and faith are opposites, and we also talked about a significant argument for the existence of God. Respected philosopher Alvin Plantinga argues that there are more than twenty good arguments for God's existence, but in this series we're only looking at three. So in Part 1, we explored the argument from the stars, or the origins of the universe.

In Part 2 we talked about a second argument for the existence of God. This was the argument from design. Basically, it's that the universe, world, and human life, carry marks of such intelligence, sophistication and beauty that it can't all be random. It defies the odds. And it points to a divine Designer—to God—who made it all.

And today, for Part 3, I'm going to present to you what I think is the most compelling argument of all. It is the argument from *morality*. It's about this idea that there is right and wrong in the world and how this is very compelling evidence for the existence of God. And at the end, I'll bring it all together and ask, 'Where does the evidence point?' and 'What difference does any of this make?'

If you've missed a Sunday, or are interested in the pushback questions (or counter-arguments) to what I've been saying you can get a re-cap and see all of that online through the podcasts and blogs on our website at www.WestminsterPC.ca. Plus, there is a page dedicated exclusively to this series at <http://westminsterpc.ca/event/does-god-even-exist/>. There you'll find links to everything all in one place.

So here we go.

THE ARGUMENT FROM MORALITY

The argument from morality basically goes like this:

People—regardless of country and culture—have a basic moral compass of right and wrong. This is a morality we are not taught. Therefore, if people have it, and if it is not something we are taught, then there must be a Maker of morality. There must be God who gave us this internal sense of right and wrong and planted it deep within us. If there are moral laws, there must be a moral law Maker who made them.

Let me explain what I mean.

“HEY BUDDY, THE REST OF US MIND!”

When I was training to be a pastor at Knox College I walked across campus one morning with a classmate to Tim Horton’s to get a coffee. When we got there, there were about 20 people in line. It was a huge line. But we all stood there patiently waiting our turn.

But then, out of nowhere, some guy walked up. He saw that there was a little space between the second and third person in the line, and he slipped in. That’s right, he cut in line! He butted. For the first few seconds no one really said anything. We wondered whether he was with someone else. But it soon became apparent that that wasn’t the case. So without hesitating, my friend Rob—who has a huge, boisterous voice—called out, ‘Hey buddy, the rest of us mind!’ The butter didn’t even turn around. He just kept staring forward. So my friend Rob said again, ‘Hey you, I’m talking to you. The rest of us were here first. Back of the line!’

So realizing that he wasn’t going to get away with it, the butter simply left. All the other people in the line turned around to my friend Rob and nodded their heads in thankful agreement for what he had done. And I bought Rob his morning coffee and donut for his willingness to restore order.

Now, what happened there? Here’s what happened. We humans, most of us, have a basic understanding of right and wrong regardless of country or culture. It’s right to wait your turn. It’s wrong to bud in line. And when someone does it, it violates our deep human concern for *fairness*. Where does this desire for fairness come from, especially if so many people from many different cultures and countries have it? It has to come from an outside source. It has to come from the Maker of morality who planted it deep within us.

Here’s another example. Going up to some strange child on the street and hurting them is wrong. I think that’s generally accepted as a bad thing to do. So if someone went up to a random child on the street, hit them with a bat, searched their pockets, and took their allowance money, that is wrong. Do some people do it? Maybe. But most people would say, regardless of their culture or country, that it is wrong. But why? I would argue that the Maker of morality planted a knowledge of right and wrong deep within us.

SOME KIND OF RULE OF FAIR PLAY ABOUT WHICH THEY REALLY AGREED

In the book of Jeremiah that we started with it says that God made a covenant, a special agreement, with his people. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts,” God declares. “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33) Something we need to realize in this passage is that it was a statement specifically addressed to God’s people. ‘So,’ some of you may ask, ‘what about others? Matthew, I thought you were talking about *all* people, even those who don’t yet believe in God?’ You’re right, that *is* what I’m talking about. Here’s why.

Later in the Bible, in chapter 2 of the book of Romans in the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes to the followers of Jesus living in ancient Rome. He writes to them about what is right and wrong behaviour before God. A part of what he says is that this sense of God's moral law—or morality, of right and wrong—is *even planted deeply within people who don't yet believe in God*. He says:

“Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. 15 They demonstrate that God's law is *written in their hearts*, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.” (Romans 2:14-15 NLT, emphasis added)

In other words, this sense of God's moral order is even put inside people who don't yet believe in him. They often follow it, even though they don't know it.

C.S. Lewis is one of the great authors and literary critics of our time. He was also a professor at Oxford University. For a while he was an atheist. But this idea that there is a morality that many different kinds of people appeal to was what compelled him to start believing in God. Thinking about the many situations when one person says something to another person about what he *should* do—whether that be being true to one's word, or sharing, or helping those in need—this is what Lewis writes:

“He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior, which he expects the other man to know about... It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed.”¹⁹

We *know* this to be true. When do our kids freak out the most? When something happens that isn't fair. And when do we adults freak out the most? When something happens that isn't fair. We're thinking of some kind of standard of behaviour that we think others should also agree to. And this is true regardless of culture or country. If there are moral laws, there must be a Maker of morality, a moral law Maker.

POPULAR COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Up until now I think you've mainly been agreeing with me. But you've had some questions. 'Sure, Matthew, but what about this or what about that?' So let's explore how people respond to this argument about God's existence from morality. After all, it's when we explore the pushbacks (the counter-arguments) that we discover where the rubber truly hits the road.

So how do people respond to all this? Let me share with you three of the most popular objections.

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 15.

THE PRODUCT OF OUR SOCIETY?

First, some people say that *our morals are just the product of our society*.

These people say that there isn't really objective and absolute right and wrong, but different societies just make decisions about what is right and wrong as they evolve through time—and that it has nothing to do with God. How do I respond to that?

In response, I ask this question: Are they saying that certain actions aren't objectively and absolutely wrong? Are they saying that hurting an innocent child or pouring toxins into a lake or budding in line or sexual assaulting someone are not wrong? Are they saying that our society just so happens to *think* they're wrong, but they're not *actually* wrong? I think that's a very naïve way of seeing things.

For example, if someone randomly assaulted a child, can someone really think that it's not objectively wrong, and that it only *seems* wrong? They might say that; but I think they're lying to themselves. If someone is unwilling to say that the holocaust was categorically wrong or that abusing a child is categorically wrong, I think they are betraying a deep inner knowledge—a knowledge that God himself has put within them and has written on their hearts—that certain things are, without doubt, wrong—wherever and whenever they happen.

THE PRODUCT OF EVOLUTION?

Second, another group of people say that *our morals are simply a product of evolution*. They argue that humans today are the product of a long evolutionary process—the one proposed by Charles Darwin—that we form morals that are simply based on “natural selection.” Darwinian evolution states that, through time, a species seeks to protect its own in order to survive. So, these people say, it adapts and changes, including its morals, in order to advance its own kind.

But here's where that line of thinking breaks down. We humans have a sense of morality that we think should apply to *all* people—not just people in our own family or who are like us. If we got our morals just from evolution, then it would be okay for people to attack other people for no reason, as long as they weren't a part of their own family. It would be okay for you to bud in line, but not for someone else. It would be okay to pour toxins into a lake as long as it wasn't a lake that your family drank from or swam in.

Let me give you an extreme example of this kind of thinking, but one that highlights what I'm talking about. In an article in *The New York Academy of Sciences*, Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer wrote an article called “Why Men Rape.” In it, they argue from evolutionary thinking, and say that rape in and of itself is not a pathology. It is “an evolutionary adaptation for maximizing reproductive success...”²⁰ That's where the logic of linking morals to evolution takes you. That

²⁰ Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, “Why Men Rape,” *The New York Academy of Sciences* (January-February, 2000): 20-28.

might fit with evolutionary theory, but we humans don't think that way. We know, deep down, that rape is *wrong*—for everyone.

Tim Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and New York Times best-selling author, spells it out clearly for us. He writes:

“For evolutionary purposes... hostility to all people outside one's group... should be just as widely considered moral and right behavior. Yet, today we believe that sacrificing time, money, emotion, and even life—especially for someone 'not of our kind' or tribe—is *right*.”²¹

So where did this moral compass come from? It came from God. As a possible explanation, the evolutionary argument makes no logical sense.

JUST WHAT THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE AGREE UPON?

Third, some people say that *our morals are simply what the majority of people agree upon*. They say that, over time, as a society evolves, we develop morals based on what the majority of people think is right. So, they argue, it's not because God has put right and wrong in our hearts, it's because a lot of people just so happen to agree about it.

To these people I would propose this scenario. What if everyone all of a sudden agreed that exterminating an entire group of people because of their race was right. Would that make it right? Of course it wouldn't. It is still wrong even if many people want to do it. And whenever this kind of atrocity has happened in world history, the global community tends to rise up and say 'Hey, you can't do that.' So just because a lot of people agree about something, that doesn't make it right.

In all of these scenarios, the only explanation that makes sense is that humans—both those who believe in God, and even those who don't—have deep within them a general sense of right and wrong. The consistency of our general morality, across cultures and countries, only makes sense if it comes from an outside source, from a Maker of Morality. Invisible moral laws point to a moral law Maker.

“I DON'T KNOW ABOUT RELIGION, BUT I LIKE JESUS”

This is where Jesus comes in—and comes in very powerfully. Part of the reason why Jesus Christ is so inspiring, so captivating, and so compelling, is because, in him, all of this purpose, design and morality gain clarity.

Here's what I mean. Even though humanity has an internal moral compass, it is still a bit cloudy. It's as if our inner compass has been left outside overnight and got some moisture under the

²¹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 153.

glass. As a result, it's a bit foggy and hard to see through. But when we learn about Jesus' teachings and follow him, the glass starts to clear.

We know that love is good, and Jesus tells us how—*specifically*.

We know that caring for the needy is good, and Jesus tells us how—*specifically*.

We know that justice is good, and Jesus tells us how—*specifically*.

We know that forgiveness is good, and Jesus tells us how—*specifically*.

We know that generosity is good, and Jesus tells us how—*specifically*.

Based on what the Bible teaches, and what our exploration of logic and reason tell us, humanity longs to embrace the truth of Jesus. How many of us have talked to people who are unsure about God or religion or the church, but who say, "You know, I don't know about all that other stuff, but I like Jesus." Why do they say that? Because God has planted that attraction deep within them! On a deep, deep level, people know that he's real and that he's right.

We humans know that there has to be something more to life and that death can't be the end. Even many atheists hope there is something after death. And Jesus, through the power of his resurrection, gives us that eternal certainty that we can't get anywhere else.

In his book *Making Sense of God*, Tim Keller describes the majesty of this Teacher and Saviour who is worthy of our gaze—not just for people who openly say they believe in him, but even those who don't. In Jesus we are

"surprised to see tenderness without any weakness, boldness without harshness, humility without any uncertainty, indeed, accompanied by a towering confidence. Readers can discover for themselves his unbending convictions but complete approachability, his insistence on truth but always bathed in love, his power without insensitivity, integrity without rigidity, passion without prejudice."²²

Novelist Julian Barnes wrote, "I don't believe in God, but I miss him."²³ She confesses that even though she doesn't yet believe, she has a deep inner longing for him. When we look at who Jesus was and is we see why.

And get this. In 2004 there was a study of atheists. And guess what? 30% of them sometimes pray!²⁴ Why? I'm guessing it's because they know on a deep, deep level, that God is actually real. They *long* for him.

And how many of us have overheard in conversations or seen on social media comments how people respond in the face of tragedy with the language of faith? People who are not religious start to say things like, "I'm praying for you," or "I'm sending positive thoughts your way." In the

²² Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York: Viking, 2016), 233.

²³ As quoted in: N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is News and What Makes it Good* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 149.

²⁴ See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/02_february/26/world-god.shtml.

midst of life's most serious moments, only religious language can give voice to our deepest yearnings. Again, this is that deep inner compass drawing us back to God even when we don't know it.

Even Richard Dawkins, the fervent atheist with whom we started this series, seems to be drawn toward the idea that there must be something more than just what meets the eye in this life. In his book *The Selfish Gene* he argues that we humans are nothing more than molecules and genes—but then goes on to say that we humans are something more. He contradicts himself!²⁵

God has placed a moral compass deep within each one of us. It draws all of us back to himself. And when we look to Jesus, he makes the foggy glass on our compass even clearer.

A CAT WRAPPED IN A BLANKET?

So, let's ask, one last time, the big question I've been asking all along. Where does the evidence point?

A few years ago on Easter weekend, I pulled into my driveway in the evening. As I casually looked at the house across the road, I noticed big clouds of smoke billowing out of the windows. The house was on fire! Then I saw a man run out of the house carrying a gas can and take off down the road in his car.

As you can imagine, I was asked to make a statement to the police, and was eventually summoned to court in an exploratory pre-trial to tell the lawyers what I saw. They wanted to weigh the evidence. I remember sitting in the witness chair, and one of the lawyers asking me, "Are you *sure* you saw a man carrying a gas can?" "Yes," I said. He replied, "Are you sure? Could he have been carrying a cat wrapped in a blanket?"

Perhaps thinking I was pretty funny, I quipped, "Well, as long as a cat in a blanket looks like a gas can." (I'm not sure the court appreciated my sense of humour.) As the day went on, what became clear was that the evidence pointed to a certain conclusion. It pointed to arson. This series has been about a similar process. It has been about looking at the evidence and seeing if it points to a convincing conclusion.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES ANY OF THIS MAKE?

Two Sundays ago I argued that the universe had to come from somewhere, and that the evidence points to a Maker of the universe—a Maker who stands outside of physical space and even time to create a world that is physical and has time. So if the question about God's existence is, as I've been saying, "the one question that changes everything," what does this mean for you and me? It means that God creates life, and he also creates you and me. In fact, he

²⁵ See the section discussing this in: Alister E. McGrath, *The Spirit of Grace: A Guide for Study and Devotion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 22-28.

is so powerful and purposeful that he can also re-create you and me. No one is too lost for God. No one is beyond his reach. With God, a new lease on life can *always* happen, change can *always* happen, better is *always* possible, and hope *always* wins.

Last Sunday I argued that the universe is jammed full of beauty. When you think it through, the evidence takes into consideration the mind-boggling level of sophistication and intelligence in our universe and all of life, resists any idea that we are here by chance or randomness, and points to a divine Designer, to God.

That means that each of us is a part of God's beautiful world. It also means that each of us is made *on* purpose and *for* a purpose. It means that when we take this fact seriously we can share something of God's beautiful world with the people around us, and bring more truth and beauty to our planet, to our relationships, and to our very existence. Each one of us can be an evangelist, a light, of God's unparalleled beauty and goodness.

And then today I argued that humans have an invisible inner moral compass, and that this is true for people of different cultures and countries. Since this can't come from anywhere else, we end with this most compelling reason of all: That there is such a thing as right and wrong, and that Jesus gives us the clearest picture of what that is. To pretend that right and wrong don't exist, is to betray what you already know deep within yourself—that God has given our world a moral order which draws us back to him.

When it comes to the great wisdom of the Christian faith, we learn that Jesus is in fact the embodiment of this moral order. He is the embodiment of God's truth; he is in fact the embodiment of God's love. And when you and I believe he is God's Son and start to follow him with integrity, we can live to glorify and honour our Creator God—the divine Designer—and get in on the very meaningful ways Jesus is renovating our world, our relationships, and our lives.

This is how we live out the words he taught us in the Lord's Prayer. "...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."²⁶ Your life may not be happy all the time, but it can be overflowing with a deeply rooted joy; and it can be growing upwards with a towering sense of purpose.

So where does the evidence point? It points to God. And it points to Jesus. I don't have enough blind faith to be an atheist. I believe in God not because I'm irrational—but because I *am* rational.

FROM BELIEVING TO KNOWING

Let me end with this thought. Toward the end of his life, Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychiatrist, was interviewed. "Dr. Jung," the interviewer said, "a lot of your writing has a religious flavor. Do you believe in God?" Jung replied by saying, "Believe in God? Well, we use the word 'believe'

²⁶ See Matthew 6: 9-13 in the New Testament.

when we think that something is true but we don't yet have a substantial body of evidence to support it. No. I don't believe in God. I *know* there's a God."²⁷

And so do I.

Amen.

²⁷ Quoted in: M. Scott Peck, *Further Along the Road Less Travelled: The Unending Journey Toward Spiritual Growth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 174.