

UNIT 1: The Attributes of God

Section 3: God's Existence

Assigned Reading:

*A. W. Pink – The Attributes of God
No Assignment this Week*

Introduction:

Surely, as a precursor to our study of the Attributes of God, it is important to establish that the God that we will be describing actually exists! If God does not exist, then to whom are we predicating all of these “attributes” to? This morning we will discuss both the way the Bible discusses God’s Existence (special revelation) and how nature/logic describes God’s Existence (general revelation). Let’s begin with a few questions:

Q1: If asked, how do you know God exists, how would you respond?

Q2: Why do people deny the existence of God?

Q3: What is the best way to approach people who deny the existence of God?

Outline:

I. The Biblical Approach to God’s Existence

A. Our Goal

1. **Culver**, “Authentic Christian apologetics does not pursue the goal of faith-compelling reasons for believing but frankly the aim of removing some obstacles to listening to the Word and of encouraging the perseverance of believers. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, not in response to arguments.”
2. The work of the Christian is not to remove the intellectual objections to Christianity by rational argument. The task is to meet head-on every part of the thinking of natural man with biblical authority, allowing the Holy Spirit to accomplish His results in the heart and mind of unredeemed man. Of course, this is to be done with grace and love. But the Apostle Paul warned us against the rationalistic approach, so that the faith of the Corinthians “should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (**1 Cor. 2:5**).
3. Reasoning with the unbeliever must be from Scripture, not to it.
4. **John R. W. Stott**: “In evangelism, then, we shall need to recognize that the men to whom we preach have minds. We shall not ask them to stifle their minds, but to open them, and in particular to open them to receive a divine illumination in order to understand the divine revelation. We shall not seek to murder their intellect (since it was given to them by God), but neither shall we flatter it (since it is finite and fallen). We shall endeavour to reason with them, but only from revelation, the while admitting our need and theirs for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit” (quoted in J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 137).
5. If we rely totally on these arguments it implies that God’s revelation of Himself is not sufficient. “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:30-31).
6. **In the following discussion** we must remember that “belief” has two senses...
 - a. A person can believe in the sense of affirming something as true (acknowledgment)
 - b. A person can believe in the sense of trust and commitment... (saving faith)
 - c. **III**) Everyone who believes in a personal devil please raise your hand...

- d. We may accept something as a fact which we may wish were not a fact...
- e. Our goal today is to explain that God exists in the “simple sense” and that this belief is rational... it is irrational to explain that God does not exist.

B. *Our Method*

1. Merely to present the idea that “belief that God exists” is rational...
2. Only God can truly save someone!
3. In the “simple sense” of belief (acknowledgement), people everywhere believe in God.
4. *Note the Bible’s approach to the situation...*
 - a. **Remember the “beginning” – Gen 1:1** (just assumes God)
 - b. **Psalm 14:1-3** The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. ² The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.
 - c. **Hamann**, "If he who denies the Divine existence is a fool, he who would demonstrate it is still a greater one." – it is greater foolishness to attempt to demonstrate what is manifest (obviously, undoubtedly true)
 - c. The Bible assumes that people believe in the existence of God. Its purpose is to present to us the correct and right picture of God!
5. *What about those who “seem” to not believe in God (explicitly or implicitly)?*
 - a. People have the ability to think and live as if certain truths were not true...
 - b. Ill) Being diagnosed w/ serious illness or problem but living as if they don’t exist
 - c. **They suppress the truth... Push it down... Rebel against it! Evident in Creation!**
 - (1) **Romans 1:18-23** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.
 - (2) **It is sin that leads people to think irrationally and deny God’s existence!**
 - d. God has given man “conscience”
 - (1) All people make “moral judgments”
 - (2) **Romans 2:14-15** For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 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,
 - (3) Where does this “right and wrong” which is so universally recognized come from? - a Great Lawgiver?

- (4) All the conscience makes us aware of is our guilt... conscience gives small comfort and ultimately no mercy at all to an individual – all that can be gained from this is that God must be holy and just
- (5) Only the Word of God can explain God's forgiveness, mercy, and grace...
- e. **Bottom Line:** General Revelation gives sufficient grounds for man's condemnation, but only Special Revelation can provide grounds for man's salvation!
 - (1) **See Ps 19... General vs Special Revelation!**
 - (2) In a sense everything that is made screams continually – “God made me!”
 - (3) General revelation (like the Law) serves to make guilty, not to make righteous!
- 6. **Utilizing Rational Arguments??**
 - a. Many elements of the arguments we will observe are latently in the Scriptures
 - b. So, for the most part we are speaking from logical-spiritual ground...
 - c. Even though these arguments are not the ultimate convincing factor to an unbeliever, they can at least provide a ground for discussion, proving rationality behind this belief
 - d. As a matter of fact, most of the “proofs” were designed to expose the irrationality of “rejecting the existence of God”
 - e. There is evidence of God in the world that He has made... so why not point it out?
 - f. The evidences present in creation are not far sufficient for men to assent to the fact that God exists... At least a starting point in sharing with the lost...
 - g. It might provide the opportunity for you to share both logical argument as well as scripture (which ought to work together), with someone who otherwise wouldn't listen –**Rom 10:17** “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
 - h. While each of these arguments are rejected by many... that rejection does not negate the fact of the evidence (*rejection is not refutation*)... both the testimony of general and special revelation!

II. Classical Proofs for God's Existence

A. Types of Evidence for the Classical Proofs

1. *A priori Evidence*

- a. This is a “pure thought” argument. It does not require one to go outside one's own thinking to establish the “fact” of God's existence
- b. The argument rests on principles all of which can be known independently of experience of the world, by just reflecting upon the principles themselves

2. *A posteriori Evidence*

- a. “from here back to there”
- b. This evidence provides arguments from “effect” back to “cause”
- c. These arguments proceed from observation about the universe by sense experience
- d. These arguments depend upon principles that can be known only by means of experience of the world

B. The Classical Proofs

1. *The Ontological Argument*

- a. ο;ntoj – form of the Gr verb “to be”

- b. The germ of the argument is found in the remark of **Augustine** (Trinity, VII. Iv.) “God is more truly *thought* than He is described, and *exists* more truly than He is thought.”
- c. **Anselm the Archbishop of Canterbury** (1033-1103)
- d. Anselm characterized his position as “faith seeking understanding”
- e. His argument can be seen as 2 separate arguments
 - (1) **1st Argument:**
 - *Basic Premise: God is a being than which none greater can be thought!*
 - *Everyone can conceive of this thought, even a fool can understand this...*
 - If such a being can be thought of, then it can be thought of as existing in one’s mind (in one’s understanding)
 - Suppose that the greatest possible being exists only as an idea in the mind
 - Existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone
 - That means we can conceive of a being greater than the greatest possible being, that is a being that also exists in reality.
 - But there can be no being greater than the greatest possible being
 - Thus, a being than which none greater can be thought must exist in reality
 - (2) **2nd Argument:**
 - A being than which none greater can be thought exists in reality (from 1st Argument)
 - Some beings which can be thought of as existing can be thought of as not existing, while some beings which can be thought of as existing cannot be thought of as not existing.
 - A being which cannot be thought of as not existing is greater than a being which can be thought of as not existing
 - Therefore, a being than which none greater can be thought cannot be thought of as not existing
 - **Anselm**, “And Thou art this being, O Lord our God. Thou so truly art, then, O Lord my God, that Thou canst not even be thought of as not existing... Thou alone, therefore, of all beings, hast being in the truest and highest sense, since no other being so truly exists, and thus every other being has less being.”

2. *The Cosmological Argument*

- a. This argument begins from the fact of the universe, and asks “how did it get here?”
- b. This fact is assumed in **Heb 3:4** “ For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.”
- c. **Thomas Aquinas and the Five Ways**
 - (1) Argument from Motion
 - Some things are in motion
 - Anything that is moved has to be moved
 - However, this leads to an infinite regress (problematic)
 - Therefore, there must be an Unmoved Mover
 - (2) Argument from Efficient Cause
 - There is an order of causes observable in the world
 - Each effect arises from a cause
 - There cannot, though, be an infinite regress

- Therefore, there must be an Uncaused Cause
- (3) Argument from Possibility and Necessity
 - It is possible for some things which now exist, to not exist
 - These contingent items cannot always have existed because of their potentiality for non-being
 - If everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence
 - But if this is true, nothing would exist now, for being cannot spring from non-being.
 - Since things do exist, there must be at least one necessary being
 - Therefore, there must be a being whose necessity is in itself (uncaused)
- (4) Argument from Gradations
 - We can speak of degrees of qualities in both inanimate objects and beings
 - There is a maximum to all of these degrees...
 - Therefore there must be a maximum being which is the cause of all other beings which possess degrees of these perfections (this is God)
- (5) Argument from Governance of the World
 - All things which lack knowledge (such as natural bodies) act for an end
 - Something which lacks knowledge cannot act toward an end
 - Therefore, there must be an intelligent Being directing natural things toward their end.
- d. **Simplified:** Everything that exists must have a cause...
 - (1) In the realm of our experience, everything we know is caused by something else
 - (2) But there cannot be an “infinite regress” of causes... if that were the case, the entire series would never have begun...
 - (3) Therefore, there must be an “uncaused cause, unmoved mover, necessary being”
- e. Ultimately this leads to a choice:
 - (1) A Self-existent God
 - (2) A Self-existent Universe
- f. But what else can we observe about the Universe?
 - (1) The universe is not behaving as if self-existent...
 - (2) 2nd Law of Thermodynamics – the universe is running down like a clock, or better said, cooling off like a giant stove – energy is constantly being diffused or dissipated – progressively distributed throughout the universe...
 - (3) Scientists have established that our universe is moving toward infinite dispersion at a regular rate... a rate that recently has been said to be accelerating
 - (4) If this has been operating as such since eternity past, it would now be infinitely dispersed, and there is no evidence of a “contracting, squeezing factor”
 - This factor is called the “oscillating universe model” – saying that the universe goes through cycles of expansion and contraction – following the “big bang” matter expands to a certain point, where the gravitational force of matter takes over to slow and eventually end its expansion (the Big Crunch)
 - The other opinion is called the “infinitely expanding universe” which explains that the universe is continually expanding outward and will in the future die a cold death (the Big Freeze)
 - Discussion of the “total matter of the universe”...

- Discoveries by astronomers regarding “supernovas” have seen that the universe is not expanding at a constant rate, but an accelerating rate... This makes the “collapse hypothesis” most unlikely!
- g. What about the question, “if God made the universe, who made God?”
 - (1) This question is senseless...
 - (2) It’s like asking, “who made the unmakeable being?” or “who caused the uncausable being?”

3. *The Teleological Argument*

- a. Many consider this argument to be a subcategory of the “cosmological argument”
- b. telos – means “end” – From Aristotle (4 types of causation: Material “stuff”, Formal “shape”, Efficient “agent”, Final “purpose”) – refers to final cause – **purpose!**
- c. This argument argues that the “design” present in the universe (harmony, order, irreducible complexity) manifests an intelligent purpose behind the universe
- d. Ill) **William Paley**, “Watch lying on the sand... - implicates a “watchmaker” watchmaker.” Not only does the intricacies of the watch indicate a “maker” but also a “purpose” for the watch, because it is made to tell time. No one would conclude that it was the result of random, purposeless activity or motion!
- e. The Universe is either a plan or an accident...
- f. How many things have to be present before you will admit intelligent design?
- g. **Psalm 94:9** “He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?”
- g. **Anthropic Cosmological Principle** – Earth is so ordered that it was uniquely designed to sustain life... ex) speed of earth’s rotation, distance from the sun (5 degrees farther and we would be a pop-sickle 5 degrees closer and we would be a pop-tart ☺), gravity of the earth, mixture of atmosphere, atmospheric shield, crust’s shield, etc...
- h. Ill) **Sir Isaac Newton** (1642-1727) built a miniature model of the solar system... By means of rods, cogwheels and belts the planets moved around the sun in an orbit relatively similar to the real thing. A friend who did not believe in creation asked Newton, “Who made this for you?” Newton replied, “Nobody. All of these balls and cogs and belts and gears just happened to come together, and wonder of wonders, by chance they began revolving in their set orbits with perfect timing...” ☺
- i. **Michael Behe** – Intelligent Design, “irreducible complexity” –ex) cilia (mini-motors)

4. *The Moral/Anthropological Argument*

- a. This argument begins from man’s sense of “right and wrong” – justice...
- b. Being good does not always pay – why should one be “moral?”
- c. Our conscience is not necessarily utterly correct, but the sense of “right and wrong” as a concept, where does this originate from? Our conscience might be weak (I Cor 8:12), good (I Pet 3:16), defiled (I Cor 8:7), seared (I Tim 4:2), strong or pure (I Cor 8:7,9), but it is never absent!
- d. What is the basis for “ethics and morality?”
- e. There must be a God who is the source of “right and wrong”
- f. **Immanuel Kant** – “idea of a highest good requires the concept of God”

- g. **C.S. Lewis** – these “standards” of morality are seen present in cultures regardless of place and time... “If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teachings of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks, and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own.”

C. Evaluation of the Classical Proofs

1. Are these proofs “valid?”
2. It depends on what you mean by valid...
 - a. If “valid” means, “they evaluate the evidence rightly and correctly reason to a true conclusion” then YES! The universe does have God as its cause, and does show evidence of purposeful design. Also, God is a being greater than which nothing can be imagined, and God has given us a sense of “right and wrong.” Even though not all people are persuaded by them, the facts in the proofs are correct!
 - b. But if “valid” means, “they are able to compel agreement from all people no matter their presuppositions and assumptions” the answer is NO! Not everyone who considers them is compelled by them...
3. Preparatory value: The value of the proofs is found in the ability to overcome “intellectual” objections of unbelievers, demonstrating that belief in God is grounded in real evidence!
 - a. Only God can enable us to be persuaded to believe in Him in the FULLEST sense!
 - b. **II Cor 4:4** The God of this world has blinded the lost... God must open their eyes!
 - c. **I Cor 2:5** Paul’s preaching came in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in wisdom of men but in the power of God.
4. Teaching/Educational value: Also, they provide believers intellectual evidence of that which they are already persuaded of inwardly and by the testimony of scripture!
 - a. **Calvin** says it is necessary for God to grant the “spectacles of faith”
 - b. When a person is “regenerated” their minds are purified and their eyes are enabled to see in nature what the scriptures so clearly describe! Appreciation of God’s handiwork!