

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“ENGAGING THE CULTURE WITH THE GOSPEL” (part 6)

DEFENDING THE FAITH (Apologetics - 2)

I. Review of Study 5

A. The Intellectual Pursuit of the Truth

- **God created us as rational beings – faith, reason, logic**
- **to find answers it will require rigorous study, debate, and faith!**

B. The Reality of Absolute Truth

- **God’s Word (living (Christ) and written (Bible)) declares there is absolute truth**
- **Called to give a defense - 1 Pet. 3:15:** *“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”*
- **The battle begins and continues in the mind – 2 Cor. 10:3-5:** *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”*
- **absolute vs. subjective truth**
- **definition of term – “objective truth”** - is not an attitude or feeling or something known or believed by all, but truth that is “independent of the knower and his consciousness.” “I itch” or “I don’t want to be selfish” is a subjective truth. “George Washington was our first president” and “I should be unselfish whether I want to or not” are objective truths. Aristotle put it this way: “saying of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not” Truth is “telling it like it is.”
- **skepticism and subjectivism**

II. Arguments for the Existence of God

The belief in a “higher power” or greater reality as the reason for our universe and existence has been accepted by most of humanity throughout history. This belief has been expressed through religion. Why has this belief been so persistent and universal? The reason for this comes from two sources – God and common sense. The Bible tells us in **Romans 1:18-20:** *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20For 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.”

Of course, many scientists will argue otherwise bound by their own bias that the world that we know and see is the result not of a higher power but of random chance over billions of years. This view has taken root in the faculties of universities across the Western World. It is important as believers in the One True God to understand why the reality of God is self-evident by observing and studying the world around us. Science, rather than proving God does not exist, actually provides clues and further evidence of the reality of this Higher Power. While we cannot know Who is this Higher Power (unless it is revealed to us) we can know the what and some of the attributes of this power by studying life, our world, and the universe.

Again, as noted in our last study, acknowledgment of a divine reality and/or being is such a part of being human, that God warns mankind twice in **the Psalms (the only two Psalms that are exactly identical – Psalm 14 and 53)** that the **“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”** “Fool” here means morally bankrupt – they’re hopeless and faithless. In addition, these Psalms declare that those who reject God will be judged (*will be in great terror – Ps. 14:5; 53:5*)

There are numerous arguments supporting the idea of a Creator and higher power who brought the universe into existence and who maintains the universe. Three main arguments include **1) the cosmological** - from “cosmos” (ie. the universe), that we can know that there is a higher power from the existence of the universe and its properties; **2) the teleological** - from “telos” which means end, aim, or goal - the complexity of the universe as well as its unity of purpose point to a designer of creation and **3) the moral/religious** - we live in a universe that not only has laws of physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics but one that has moral laws that govern life and spiritual/religious realities that transcend the physical properties of life and our universe. Science supports the first two – and the human heart and experience support that last one. Let’s now look at the various arguments within the three broader themes just mentioned.

Before we look at the various arguments it is important to look at God’s Word to see what it says about the reality of a Creator outside of time and space. Note how these verses speak of God as outside time and space. In **Gen. 1:1** we find that God was already there in the beginning when He made our universe. Also note in **Jn. 1:1** that the Word or *Logos* of God was there, too. We know the *Logos* to be Christ! (**Jn.1:14-18**). In Ephesians we read how God also chose us before Creation to be His adopted children through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. Finally, in **I Cor. 12**, Paul likens the Church to the human body – composed of many parts but designed to work together as one, with a common purpose and direction.

Gen. 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word (“Logos” – see last study) and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Eph. 1:3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...”

I Cor. 12:12-27: “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19If they were all one member, where would the body be?”

20But now there are many members, but one body. **21**And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." **22**On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; **23**and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, **24**whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, **25**so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **26**And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. **27**Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."

A. The Cosmological Arguments

What has science discovered about the nature of our universe? It had a beginning (the big bang) – a universe comprised of time and space. We know that you can't have time unless there is a beginning. If there is no beginning, then there can be no future – since you are going both backwards and forwards on the timeline – what you have is infinity or always present. That is not true in our universe. And what do we know about space? The universe is comprised of matter or energy and that the present matter of the universe cannot be created or destroyed. The energy just changes form. That is called the law of the conservation of energy/mass. Then there is the law of entropy or second law of thermodynamics that reveals that everything is breaking down and/or dying. Think of radioactive isotopes – like carbon 14 - we determine their age by their half-life – the time it takes for half of its atoms to breakdown to no longer be carbon 14. Finally, we live in a universe governed by cause and effect. Things do not happen spontaneously – there is a cause or reason for everything that happens. Thus, in order for there to be a universe with such properties and laws there must be something outside the universe who created it. This power would be infinite or timeless and powerful and beyond human comprehension since we are finite creatures.

1. **argument from change** – everything is in a state of change even as it is constant (think of an acorn that grows into an oak tree or a baby who grows into a mature adult. Everything in the universe is changing and is dependent on other agents of change (time, matter, space). What causes the change and allows for the change of the entire universe and its parts. There must be an outside unchanging source? The only answer is God.
2. **argument from efficient causality** – everything in the universe is the result of cause and effect. So, who was the first cause? Beyond everything there is only nothing. But nothing cannot cause something? Nothing begets nothing. So there must be something uncaused, something on which all things that need an efficient cause of being are dependent. Existence is like a gift given from cause to effect. If there is no one who has the gift, the gift cannot be passed down the chain of receivers, however long or short the chain may be. If there is no God who has existence by his own eternal nature, then the gifts of existence cannot be passed down the chain of creatures and we can never get it. But we do get it: we exist. Therefore, there must exist a God: An Uncaused Being who does not have to receive existence like us – and like every other link in the chain of receivers.
3. **argument from time and contingency** – things that come into being go out of being – life to death or breakdown of inanimate objects. But what accounts for its life in the first place? Even with an infinite amount of time if there is nothing how can something come into being and then be sustained and then go out of being? Therefore, in order to have life and to have matter there must be something that *cannot not exist* that is the result of everything that now exists. This sort of being is called necessary. Therefore, the absolute necessary being is God.

B. The Teleological Argument – from “telos” which means end, aim, or goal - the complexity of the universe as well as its unity of purpose point to a designer of creation. Think of the galaxies, solar systems, stars, planets, earth in its perfect position for life, earth itself, the animal and plant worlds, the human body, DNA, cell structure and how everything is designed on earth to produce and sustain life. This speaks of not just a higher power who is all powerful but one who is all knowing and personal. The Creator is the embodiment of all knowledge.

1. **argument from design** – the universe and all of its parts display a staggering amount of intelligibility both within the things we observe and in the way these things relate to others outside themselves. In other words, the way the way the exist and coexist display an intrinsically beautiful order and regularity that produce awe and wonder in the human soul. It is the norm of nature for many different beings and elements to work together to produce the same valuable end – think organs in a body that produce life and health. Either this complexity and unity is the product of an intelligent Creator/Designer or by random chance? Which requires more faith?
2. **argument from degrees of perfection** – we can observe different degrees of quality and substance in every created thing – from best to worst, or weak to strong, or the perfect to the imperfect. This ability to observe and correct things for the better are part of being human. In order for there to be these varying degrees of perfection, and the ability to adjust, there must exist a “best” – a source and real standard of all the perfections that we know as beings. Thus, the absolute perfect being is God – the perfection of all perfections. Think of the following realities: Life, Health, Love, Truth, Right, Good, Perfection. All must precede the following: Death, Disease, Hate, Falsehood, Wrong, Bad, Imperfection. In other words, all the latter realities are deviations, perversions, or failures of the original former realities. Thus, where did the first order “good” realities come from? Random chance?

C. Other Arguments

1. **argument from consciousness** – the order and intelligibility of the universe is comprehensible by the human mind. However, the universe itself, its properties and its creatures are not intellectually aware of this order and complexity. Only the human mind can apprehend and comprehend such things. We can understand the world around us and ourselves with all its detail and design amidst unconscious material processes. Since we can experience the universe as intelligible it means that either the universe and our finite minds so well designed to grasp it are the result of intelligence or both intelligibility and intelligence are the products of blind chance. The idea that our thinking and our ability to reason, make judgments and act on those judgments are simply the result of nonrational impersonal forces is illogical.
2. **argument from truth** – Augustine contended that our limited minds can discover eternal truths about being. Truth properly resides in the mind. But the human mind is not eternal. Therefore, there must exist an eternal mind in which these truths reside.
3. **argument from desire** – every natural, innate desire in us corresponds to some real object that can satisfy that desire. But there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, on earth and no living being can satisfy. Therefore, there must exist something more than anything in the natural world that can satisfy that desire. This “something” is what people call “God” and “life with God” forever. C. S. Lewis speaks to this reality in *Mere Christianity* where he writes, “*Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find*

in myself a desire, which not experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world.” God’s Word tells us that there is more to life than our natural desires. We were made to experience God’s love, joy and peace forever. This “forever” is beyond what we can either think or imagine! Paul wrote in **I Cor. 2:9: “But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”** And then in **Rom. 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”**

4. **argument from aesthetic experience and human language** – there is the art of Monet and the music of Bach, therefore there must be a God! Art and music have no purpose in relation to the evolutionary utilitarian premise of survival of the fittest. One could also add the incredible complexity and interchangeability of human language. There are literally thousands of different human languages in our world past and present that convey information – our desires, intentions, opinions, and conclusions – all differently and yet they are all translatable from one to the other. These languages had to be developed over time which tool rational thought and expression not random chance.

D. Moral and Religious Arguments – we live in a universe that not only has laws of physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics but one that has moral laws. In other words, there is right and wrong – good and evil and laws that reflect as such. These laws are found in the human heart – and transcend culture, time, or place. These laws are self-evident – you shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie and so forth. We can know and choose between the self-centered way and the other centered way. And the idea of the right way is determined by the way of love. How do we know right from wrong? What are the most life affirming principles for the community? In other words, that which is right is going to enhance the betterment of the community and ultimately the individual. So, the righteous path – the way of righteousness is the way of love and vice versa. We all know this as human beings but what gets in the way – ourselves. There is nothing wrong with loving self – taking care of our bodies, taking care of our minds and souls. However, it’s when self becomes more important than others and ultimately God that there’s a problem. Hence the commands to love your neighbor as yourself and to do to others as you would do to yourself.

1. **the moral argument** – we have an objective moral obligation to do good and avoid evil. This is a common premise for most religions. The atheist view of reality, however, precludes there being any such moral obligation. The religious position would be we are obligated because of the laws of the universe given by a law giver. The atheist would contend that our morality is simply the result of our own desires or subjective dispositions. Therefore, morality is simply based on what a person or society feels as right. There is no greater authority for right and wrong than the self. As a result, we have no moral obligations outside of what we feel compelled to do. Ultimately, “might makes right,” which is a direct parallel to the evolutionary idea of “survival of the fittest.”
2. **the argument from conscience** – the common modern view in Western society is that there are no universally binding moral obligations. Rather, what is most important is following our own conscience. But if not following one’s conscience is wrong – and most would argue this to be so, then we have an objective moral obligation! Like we saw above in the moral argument, our conscience then becomes the absolute authority. Then the question must be asked, “Where does the conscience get such authority?” There are only four answers – 1) something less than man (nature) but how can we be obligated to something less than us? 2) from me (the individual) but how can I obligate myself absolutely? Am I absolute? I have the freedom to not be absolute by deciding no to my obligations. 3) from society (my peers) but what right do they have to impose their values on me? Does something become right only because the majority of society deems it so? Or 4) God (something way above me and society) – the only source of absolute authority

possible to make moral obligations absolute would be God or something like God which binds our wills, morally and rightfully demands complete obedience.

3. **the argument from religious experience** – people around the world and throughout history have had what could be called “religious experiences” where they have perceived and experienced realities and personal beings that transcend the natural order. This “divine” reality may not prove the existence of God as these experiences vary widely and God is not always the object of their experience. And yet, there is a common aspect to all of them. There is an awakening to knowledge and/or love that either fills the spirit and soul of the individual or gives them an awareness that there is a greater capacity to experience such things. The question remains, do we believe them? Their claims are either true or not. There are three areas of evaluation - 1) *the consistency* of the claims (are they self-consistent as well as consistent with what we otherwise know to be true? 2) *the character* of those who make the claims and 3) *the effects* these experiences have had on the lives affected by the divine and the impact they had on others and on society. From the Christian perspective such evidence provides testimony to the reality of the power of God’s grace and mercy in Christ! We find all three in the lives of the first disciples and continuing on in the life of the Body of Christ (the Church) until the present day. In fact, Jesus on numerous occasions told us that a means of discernment of whether someone is living in truth and growing in His love is by the “fruit” they produce in their lives. As we read in **Lk. 6:43-45**, **“For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44“For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”** And it is why Jesus said that we are to be **“His witnesses...to the ends of the earth”** in **Acts 1:8**.
4. **the common consent religious argument** – a combination of the experience and desire arguments, it argues that belief in God/Higher Power and the reverence and worship that go with it are common to most people throughout history and the world today. Either the vast majority of people have been wrong about this most profound element of their lives, or they are right. In other words, the desire to worship and revere something greater than ourselves is an innate part of our being. If so, where does that desire and tendency come from? Random chance? Unsurprisingly, some evolutionary scientists and philosophers argue as such – that our belief in God is a product of evolution! And yet, this yearning for the divine is one of the many areas that qualitatively distinguish us from animals. It reflects our being made in God’s image.

But how is the Divine revealed personally? God has done it at times where He has broken through time and space, where He has supplanted the natural laws of the universe – angels, visions, words both audibly heard and those in the mind, miracles, dreams but the totally complete revelation has been through His Son, Jesus Christ. No mere mortal, no angelic being could totally convey God in perfection and fullness. It would have to be God Himself. Next study we will continue to look at the evidence for God and how life reveals God’s nature and plan for mankind. We will also look at the reality of miracles and angels as well as how evolution relates to God as Creator and whether or not evolution contradicts creation.