

The Existence of God – Summer Elective Lesson One

What do we believe in the EFCA?

God

We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

Introduction

“There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.... No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.... But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it.... Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.... I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.”

-- Charles H. Spurgeon (when he was twenty years old)

The Existence of God

How would you answer these questions:

- ***Do you think most people today believe in the existence of God?***
- ***Has this been true throughout history?***

How do we know that God exists?

First, people throughout the world have an inner sense of God.

- People everywhere have a deep, inner sense that God exists, that they are his creatures, and that he is their Creator.
- Paul says in **Rom. 1:18-21**: *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*
- Yet Scripture also recognizes that some people deny this inner sense of God and even deny that God exists.

- In **Psalm 14:1 and 53:1** David states that: *“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.”*
- In **Psalm 10:3-4** it is the wicked person who first *“curses and renounces the Lord”* and then in pride repeatedly thinks *“there is no God.”*
- ***What do these passages seem to indicate?***
- That sin leads people to think irrationally and to deny God’s existence (suppress the truth), and that it is someone who is thinking irrationally or who has been deceived who will say, *“There is no God.”*
- ***What is the best way to approach someone who denies the existence of God?***

Second, we believe the evidence that is found in nature.

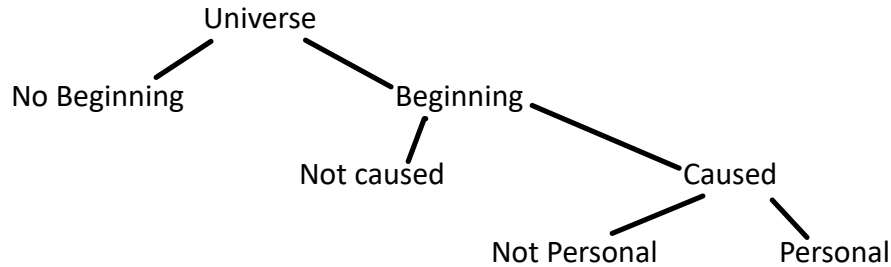
In Nature (God’s Works) – General Revelation

- The universe and our world contained in it also gives abundant evidence of God’s existence.
- In Romans 1:20, Paul says that God’s eternal nature and deity have been *“clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”*
- This broad reference to *“the things that have been made”* suggests that in some sense every created thing gives evidence of God’s character.
- In that regard, it is man himself, created in the image of God, that ultimately bears witness to the existence of God: whenever we meet another human being, we should realize that such an incredibly intricate, skillful, communicative living creature could only have been created by an infinite, all-wise Creator.
- Look at your hand.
 - o ***Is it more or less complex than a wristwatch?***
 - o ***Is it logical to think that either one of them just came about by an accidental combination of elements?***

Traditional “Proofs” for the Existence of God

- The traditional *“proofs”* for the existence of God have been constructed by Christian (and some non-Christian) philosophers at various points in history.
- They are attempts to analyze the evidence, especially the evidence from nature, in extremely careful and logically precise ways, in order to persuade people to consider the idea of God’s existence.
- If it is true that sin causes people to think *irrationally* then these proofs are attempts to cause people to think *rationally* or correctly about the evidence for God’s existence, in spite of the irrational tendencies caused by sin.
- Most of the traditional proofs for the existence of God can be classified in four major types of argument:

- **The *cosmological argument*** considers the fact that every known thing in the universe has a cause. Therefore, it reasons, the universe itself must also have a cause, and the cause of such a great universe can only be God. (Muslims also advocate this argument)



- Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
 - The universe began to exist.
 - Therefore, the universe has a cause.
- **The *teleological argument*** is really a subcategory of the cosmological argument. It focuses on the evidence of harmony, order, and design in the universe, and argues that its design gives evidence of an intelligent purpose. Since the universe appears to be designed with a purpose, there must be an intelligent and purposeful God who created it to function this way. Some of you may be familiar with the **Anthropic Principle**:
 - simply stated, it implies that when we look at the world around us, it would seem that the universe was somehow designed to support and nourish human life.
 - This concept did not originate with Christian scholars. But the apparent design in the universe is virtually undeniable by experts of every religious and nonreligious group. Here are a few hard facts that this principle identifies:
 - Raise or lower the universe's rate of expansion by even one part in a million, and it would have ruled out the possibility of life.
 - If the average distance between stars were any greater, planets like earth would not have been formed; any smaller, the planetary orbits necessary for life would not have occurred.
 - If the ratio of carbon to oxygen had been slightly different than it is, none of us would have been here to breathe the air.
 - Change the tilt of the earth's axis slightly in one direction, and we would freeze. Change it the other direction, and we would burn.
 - Suppose the earth had been a bit closer or further from the sun, or just a little larger or smaller, or if it rotated at a speed different from the one it is spinning at now. Given any of these changes, the resulting temperature variations would be completely fatal.
 - The point: Someone has gone to a lot of effort to make things just right so that you and I could be here and enjoy life. (Adapted from *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Hybels and Mittelberg, pp. 13-14)

- **The ontological argument** begins with the idea of God, who is defined as a being “greater than which nothing can be imagined.” It then argues that the characteristic of existence must belong to such a being, since it is greater to exist than not to exist.
- **The moral argument** begins from man’s sense of right and wrong, and of the need for justice to be done, and argues that there must be a God who is the source of right and wrong and who will someday mete out justice to all people. (I believe C.S. Lewis seeks to make this argument in Mere Christianity, which was written during WWII)
- Now, each of these arguments are based on facts about the creation that are indeed true facts, we could say that all of these proofs (when carefully constructed) are, in an objective sense, valid proofs.
- As Wayne Grudem puts it: *“They are valid in that they correctly evaluate the evidence and correctly reason to a true conclusion—in fact, the universe does have God as its cause, and it does show evidence of purposeful design, and God does exist as a being greater than which nothing can be imagined, and God has given us a sense of right and wrong and a sense that his judgment is coming someday. The actual facts referred to in these proofs, therefore, are true and in that sense the proofs are valid, even though not all people are persuaded by them.”* (Systematic Theology, p. 172, 2nd ed)
- In his article dated February 11, 2025, ReExamining the Arguments for the Existence of God, Larry Sanger, an American philosopher, internet entrepreneur, and co-founder of Wikipedia makes these points with regard to these traditional arguments:

As I found myself returning to the old arguments for the existence of God, I did not slap myself on the forehead and say, “Oh! It turns out that this is a great argument! I guess I believe in God after all!” Even today I deny that, individually [my emphasis], the traditional arguments for the existence of God are particularly persuasive.

[He goes on] what I dwelled upon more than anything is the fact that the arguments taken together are far more persuasive than I had understood. Individually, the arguments might seem relatively weak. As I said, the Argument from Contingency [Cosmological] only shows that a necessary being exists. The Argument from Causality shows only that the universe had a cause outside of itself. The Argument from Design [Teleological] shows only that the universe has some sort of designer or other. An Argument from Morality might add that the designer is benevolent, to some degree, in some way, but not even necessarily personal. But what happens when we combine all the arguments to make a unified case for the existence of God? I’m not sure the idea had ever dawned on me, certainly not with its present vividness. Taken together, the arguments point to a necessary being that exists apart from space, time, and matter. This is the very cause of the universe, which was designed according to orderly abstract laws. Ever more complex properties emerge, one from another, with great beauty and rationality—rationality that exhibits various mind-like features. This order can even be described as good, a cosmos indeed, because life and its preservation seem to be part of the plan, and life is the very standard of value.

- The value of these proofs, then, lies chiefly in overcoming some of the intellectual objections of unbelievers. What they can and cannot do:
 - They cannot bring unbelievers to saving faith, for that comes about through belief in the testimony of Scripture and the Gospel.
 - They can help overcome objections from unbelievers
 - For believers, they can provide further intellectual evidence for something they have already been persuaded of from their own inner sense of God and from the testimony of Scripture.
 - (If time allows) ***Turn to someone near you (not your spouse) and share which argument speaks to you the most and which speaks to you less.***

Thirdly, we believe the evidence that is found in Scripture.

In addition to people's inner awareness that God exists, evidence of his existence is also to be seen in Scripture.

In Scripture (God's Words) – Special Revelation

- The Bible everywhere assumes that God exists.
- Genesis 1:1 does not present evidence for the existence of God but begins immediately to tell us what he has done: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- So, if we believe that the Bible is true, then we know from the Bible not only that God exists but also know something about his nature and his actions.
- In **Acts 14:17**, Barnabas and Paul state that the "*rains and fruitful seasons*" as well as the "*food and gladness*" that all people experience and benefit from are said to be witnesses to God.
- David, in **Psalm 19:1-2** tells us of the witness of the heavens: "*The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.*"
- Then there is God's "Word" described in
 - **John 1:1-5;14, 18** - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.... ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*
 - **John 10:30** – "*I and the Father are one.*"
 - **John 14:9-11** - *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."*

In light of what we have looked at so far, if someone were to say to you that your faith is a blind faith, how would you respond? How might you respond with a question(s)?

- Therefore, when we believe that God exists, we are basing our belief *not* on some blind hope apart from any evidence, but on *an overwhelming amount of reliable evidence from God's words and God's works*.
- It is a characteristic of true faith that it is a confidence based on reliable evidence, and faith in the existence of God shares this characteristic.

Only God Can Overcome Our Sin and Enable Us to Be Persuaded of His Existence

Finally, it must be remembered that in this sinful world God must enable us to be persuaded or we would never believe in him.

- We read that *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"* (2 Cor. 4:4).
- Furthermore, Paul says that *"since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe"* (1 Cor. 1:21).
- In this sinful world, human wisdom is inadequate for coming to know God. Thus, Paul's preaching came *"in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God"* (1 Cor. 2:5).
- We are dependent upon God to remove the blindness and irrationality caused by sin and to enable us to evaluate the evidence rightly, believe what Scripture says, and come to saving faith in Christ.

In the life of a Christian this inner awareness of God becomes stronger and more distinct.

- We begin to know God as our loving Father in heaven and The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God. **Romans 8:15, 16**

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

- We come to know Jesus Christ living within our hearts. **Ephesians 3:17-19** (Phil. 3:8, 10; Col. 1:27; John 14:23).

"So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

- The awareness for a Christian is such that though we have not seen our Lord Jesus Christ, we indeed love him. **1 Peter 1:8-9**

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."