

WHY BELIEVE YOU EXIST?

WHY Series (Part 1) | Romans 1:20-21, 25

The God Delusion?

A few weeks ago, our staff crowd-sourced responses to the simple question: **What would you like to ask God?** As you can imagine, dozens of questions came in; but there were some *common themes*. We took the top five of those themes and formulated them into a set of questions that we're going to explore together over these next several weeks. The very first may not surprise you: "God, how do I know you are even THERE to ask these questions to?" In other words: *Why* should I *believe you even exist?* It's a question lots of people ask.

To the mind of certain skeptics, believing in God is like trusting in an imaginary friend. It may be comforting for a season, but it's something we need to grow out of. Atheist philosopher, Daniel Dennett, refers to people with grown-up, enlightened minds like this as "brights," presumably in contrast to those who are "dim-wits"¹ – those of us who (as Dennett's more famous friend, Richard Dawkins, says) suffer from THE GOD DELUSION. Dawkins maintains that "the higher one's intelligence or education level, the less one is likely to be religious or hold 'beliefs' of any kind."²

What do you make of this? Do you resonate with it? Are you troubled by it? I'm certainly not the brightest bulb in the pack; but, like many of you, I've had a reasonably solid education. So why, after running into all the articulate skepticism I did as a student at Yale and Princeton, and all the tragedies and questions and religious ugliness I've seen over the years since then, can I still stand here and say with conviction: "*I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth*"?³ As I try to communicate here each week, a major reason for my belief is because this God chose to reveal himself to the people of Israel, through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and through the historic church. But, recognizing that these may seem to some skeptics as tired or insufficient causes for belief, let me suggest today FOUR other reasons. See if you can relate to any of them.

Reasons to Believe in God

FIRST, I believe in God because of the hunger human beings have for Him. There has not arisen a human society, save for the soul-suppressing and ultimately failed experiment of Communism, that has not expressed in multiple ways a religious hunger. As the great Oxford scholar, C.S. Lewis, once observed there is no fundamental appetite -- whether it be for food or water or sex whose object does not exist in reality. We don't make up food to satiate our empty fantasies. We have hunger because we are made to eat. As King Solomon wrote: "**God has set eternity in the human heart**" (Ecc 3:11). Augustine of Hippo, one of the most brilliant minds to ever walk the

earth wrote: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee."

I believe in God, SECONDLY, because we experience His effects. I cannot claim to have encountered God with all my senses in the way that I would like. But sometimes I hear words forming in my brain and it seems that He is speaking to me. Other times I see him in the majesty and beauty of the physical order. There are moments when I've felt touched and comforted by what seemed a Presence unseen. There have been days when I have tasted and smelled the splendor of life and felt "This is transcendent, it comes from Somewhere very high, from Someone very good." Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind from before the age of two, could receive no articulate communication from anyone outside of her for the first portion of her life. Years later, in a letter she wrote to Phillips Brooks, Helen told him that "she had always known about God, even before she had any words. Even before she could call God anything, she knew God was there... In her darkness and isolation, she knew she was not alone. Someone was with her. She felt God's love. And when she received the gift of language and heard about God, she said [I] already knew."⁴

All of this doesn't stop me from wishing I had *more* proof. I'm like the people who approach Jesus, "**asking him to show them a sign from heaven**" (**Matt 16:1**). I'd like God to write a message in the stars that says, "I am here," or put a great hand in the heavens each morning, lifting the sun into place. But then, it is entirely possible that after a year of seeing that, I might find myself no longer noticing it or thinking, "It's just coincidence or an accident that it looks that way." How many glories before which we marveled as children do we no longer even see? Are we sure God hasn't already given us hundreds of signs of his presence in our times?

And is everything that is REAL something we apprehend with one of the five senses? Do you smell microwaves, or just the popcorn they pop? Do you see television transmissions, or just the image they produce? Can you touch, taste, or box Love directly? I think not, but Love's effects are the most touching and delicious thing about life. Jesus said: "**The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with... the Spirit [of God]**" (**John 3:8**). I've seen God change my heart toward my enemies, and nothing natural explains that. I've seen the addictive patterns of dozens of people I know, altered profoundly only as they opened themselves up to what they called the Higher Power. Where have you beheld some sail flapping, some boat moving, though you could not actually see the wind?

I also believe in God, THIRDLY, because the Creation itself proclaims a Creator. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "**Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse**" (**Rom 1:20**). All of us know atheists who claim that they have looked closely at the

evidence and found it wanting. There are, however, numerous extremely bright biologists, physicists, and astronomers who have looked at the evidence and concluded differently.

In his book, *The Intelligent Universe*, Cambridge astronomer, Sir Fred Hoyle, writes: "*As [we] discover more and more about the awesome complexity of life, it is apparent that its chances of originating by accident are so minute that they can be completely ruled out. Life cannot have arisen by chance.*" Princeton University biologist, Dr. Edwin Conklin says: "*The probability of life originating from accident is comparable to the probability of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing factory.*" So, who REALLY is crazy, in denial, or suffering from delusion?

One of Richard Dawkins most famous associates was an Oxford university professor named Antony Flew, holder of the prestigious John Locke prize in Mental Philosophy. The *London Times* called him "*one of the most renowned atheists of the past half-century, whose papers and lectures have formed the bedrock of unbelief for many adherents.*" Several years ago, however, Antony Flew confessed that he had begun to seriously question his former unbelief. "*Since the beginning of my philosophical life,*" says Flew, "*I have followed the policy of Plato's Socrates: We must follow the argument wherever it leads... If I am shown to have been wrong, well, okay, so I was wrong.*" Flew says that his conversion to belief in a Creator God emerged out of his close contact with Gerald Schroeder, an Israeli physicist, and with the science writer, Roy Abraham Varghese, author of *The Wonder of the World*. The brilliant professor became convinced that "there is a fine-tuning to the Universe and the development of life that is simply impossible to explain without the agency of God."⁵

A Final Reason

In his book, *THE GOD DELUSION*, Richard Dawkins writes: "*Any God capable of designing a universe, carefully tuned to lead to our evolution, must be a supremely complex and improbably entity that needs an even bigger explanation than the one He is supposed to provide*" in the Bible. What an odd thing for a bright man to say. It makes me think he's not read much of the Bible. Dawkins essentially says: "God can't exist because he is beyond our comprehension." But isn't that basically the very definition of God?⁶ **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8-9).**

Alvin Plantinga, the Templeton Prize-winning philosopher, notes: "*The very practice of science [today] requires that one reject the idea of [anything beyond our understanding of natural causes] ever happening. This argument is like the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys only under the streetlight on the grounds that the light was better there.*"⁷

Why is it so hard for some intelligent people to believe that the key of Truth might be found where they've not been looking? It seems only rational to admit the possibility of entire realms of reality, dimensions of existence, means of operation that are simply beyond our knowledge now. There was a time, a short while ago, when we didn't know that the microbial world or the subatomic universe existed? It is one thing to say that we don't yet have the scientific instrumentation to register the existence of a Supernatural dimension like the one the Bible posits. But it seems to me less than "bright" to conclude that, because WE lack the tools and understanding, this Being couldn't possibly exist. This kind of anti-theism seems more faith than reason.

So, let me close with our original question: WHY believe you exist, God? I can imagine God responding: If the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus isn't sufficient enough evidence for you, then here is why you can confidently believe: Because of the hunger human beings have had for Me throughout the ages... Because of My redemptive effects in your life, the lives of others, and across the span of history... Because this Universe and the Life you see around you are finally inexplicable without Me. And if that still isn't enough then believe, ironically, because such basically good minds are willing to go to such great lengths, to try to disprove Him. Paul makes the point this way: **"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised."** (Rom 1:21,25)

Can I make a confession before we go? When I was an atheist, I was not objective in my consideration of the evidence for God. I told myself I was being rational and exhaustive in my analysis of the subject; but I wasn't being, for a simple reason: I did not want GOD to exist. WHY? Because I had that job sown up. I liked being Master of my own Universe, accountable to no one but myself. I liked worshipping and serving created things. The existence of a real GOD would be a seriously inconvenient truth. How about you? What you believe about God may say more about how you want to position yourself than anything else. Or maybe, you're just on a good investigative journey toward the Truth. If so, take encouragement from the promise of Jesus and the Word of God as you go today: **"If you seek you will find" (Matt 7:7)** and **"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).**

Let's pray together...

¹ Daniel Dennett, *The New York Times*, July 12, 2003.

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), 1.

³ This line is from *The Apostles' Creed*, one of the oldest Christian statements of faith

⁴ From a sermon by The Rev. Barbara C. Crafton, "Phillips Brooks and Helen Keller," *Outlook*, March 1992, pp.3-5.

⁵ James A. Beverley, "Thinking Straighter," *Christianity Today*, April 2005, p.80.

⁶ Charles Colson, *The Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 39.

⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 406.