

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

◆Intro: Many of us, I am sure, have experienced children going through the “why” phase. Know what I mean? “Daddy, why is the grass green?” (“Ah, because we paint it that color. Go ask your mother!”). “Daddy, why do leaves fall of the trees?” Why questions. “It’s time for bed, honey.” (“why?”). “Mommy, why do fish just lay there when you take them out of the fish tank?” GK Chesterton observes that the more we accomplish, and the more we acquire, the more we ask questions of why. People without a lot, can preoccupy themselves with survival, or getting more and never wonder about deep things. We believe that the stuff we chase will fill the void. But after we get it and discover it doesn’t, then we start thinking more. Well, lets ask a big why question today.

◆Next week we will embark on a six week study of the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi. Malachi writes to the Hebrew nation some 400 years before the coming of Christ. The people of Israel had a fair share of doubts about God. Did he really love them? Does it really matter if we go to church or what we do there? Does it make any difference who I marry or if we stay committed? Why can’t I do what I want with my money? How come things aren’t getting better? –Lots of doubts. And we’ll talk about all those. But today I thought we’d lay the foundation with asking “Why believe in God at all?” So lets break that down.

◆1. What does it mean to believe in God? Now there are many good, reasonable bases for believing in God that we’ve looked at in the past. For example

◆A. The argument from order (teleological argument): which basically says that the clear and obvious order to the world

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

demonstrates that there must be an orderer. 18th Century philosopher William Paley offers the classic scenario: suppose you are walking along an uninhabited beach in Australia and you pick up a rock. You might suppose it's been there forever. But suppose you pick up a watch! You would immediately assume someone had been there before you due to the fact that we just don't see watches naturally occurring on their own. The pins, the springs, the gears all point to design, and intelligent design at that. Same thing with the universe. It's far too precise to be accidental. And since the observed laws of science suggest that things tend to break down and move from order to disorder (entropy), something or someone must be behind order we find in everything from DNA of flowers to orbits of planets. Darwin himself said "To suppose that the eye with so many parts all working together could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely admit, absurd." But we're not going to talk much the argument from order.

◆B. We're also not going to talk about the moral argument for the existence of a God, which wonders why there is the idea among all people everywhere of moral right and wrong. If humans are mere evolved germs how do we account for 1) thinking and personhood, but 2) for a sense of moral code –unless there is one that impinges on us from a moral code-maker.

◆C. Finally, neither will we spend time on the scientific principle for sufficient reason (the cosmological argument) which says everything has a cause. There is a reason for everything (except perhaps for

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

being a Bears fan). So if there was a Big Bang, what or who pulled the trigger? What was the cause?

◆As I've said, we've discussed these before, and they are weighty, but lets take another route. Demographics tell us that 90% of Americans already believe in God. Of the 10% that don't only 3% are atheist. The Bible tells us that Americans aren't the only people who agree that God exists.

Check this!

◆*"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder." James 2:19, NIV.*

◆So even the spirit world agrees that there is a God. So how are we any different from a demon who also "believes in God."? It depends what you mean. Some folks say they believe in God, but they mean only that they recognize he exists. Demons do that too. But demons don't want a relationship with God. Other folks rightly realize that to really believe in God means following him through life, living for him, obeying his directions, etc. This is the definition I'd like to use this morning. So "why should I believe in God? ie, Why should I live in an obedient relationship with God? Here are some good reasons to ponder...

◆**2. If there is a God and I believe in him, my life has lasting meaning.**

◆This is what the writer of Ecclesiastes is finding out and what atheist philosophers freely admit. King Solomon is journalling. He's writing down all the things he's tested out in an effort to find happiness, reason, meaning.

◆He had more money than he could ever spend. The Old Testament says that during his reign Solomon made silver as common as stones

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

in Jerusalem. (Can you imagine? “What’s that on the street Jonathan? Or it’s just a silver dollar. Kick it out of the way!”) But if we read on in Ecclesiastes we’ll see that like the Beatles, Solomon found that money can’t buy you love.

◆ He tried the love thing too, at least the physical side. He had a harem. Lots and lots of beautiful women just for him. He tried building projects. The temple he built took seven years. But then his own palace took 13! He tried long hours at the office, no relaxation. He tried more education. And he wrote it all down, and chapter one is actually his conclusion. Its all meaningless.

◆ The term is literally “vapor”, like your warm breath on a cold morning. You can see it for a moment and but you can’t put it in your pocket. Solomon is not the last philosopher to say these things. He’s basically saying that everything just keeps going around and arriving nowhere. Look at his description:

◆ v4 Generations come and generations go.

◆ v5 The sun rises and the sun sets and tomorrow? Same thing.

◆ v6 The jet stream just keeps a’blowing.

◆ v7 Rain makes rivers, which make oceans, which make more rain.

◆ v9 History keeps repeating itself.

◆ v11 Guess what? We don’t know anyone who lived in Lafayette 150 years ago. And 150 years from now, no one here in Lafayette will even know that Randy was here, or Sally was here, or Sam.

◆ Makes you feel, well, like a vapor, right? In verse 8 Solomon calls it “weary”. It’s kinda like Solomon is saying “Murphy’s law just keeps coming

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

around!” You’ve heard of Murphy’s law, right? It includes wisdom like the following:

- ◆ “If you want it to rain, wash your car”;
 - ◆ “A peanut butter and jelly sandwich will always land face down”;
 - ◆ “Telling a man the bench has wet paint means he will now have to touch it”;
 - ◆ “In order to get a bank loan you must first prove that you do not need the money.” -Murphy’s law.
- ◆ Life, and expectations and hope seem to vanish like smoke. Things just keep going wrong. You’re having a nice time at a party until one ditz hurts your feelings and the night is basically over for you. You have dreams of new buys and bigger sales, but then your child dies and none of it matters anymore. You’re out fishing, but your wife is mad at you and eventually you will have to go home. She’s has all your laundry! What does life mean? Is it going somewhere? This is what Solomon is saying: if empirical data, what we have here in this world, is all there is, there’s not much point to hanging around, because much of life appears to go nowhere.
- ◆ And this my friends is the philosophical underpinning of evolutionism. Evolutionism as a worldview posits that all that is, is an accidental result of unintelligent, undesigned and un-purposed happenings. It says that there is no reason we are here. It holds that there is no God, or first Cause to which we answer. You might see that if this is true it is a small step to abortion, euthanasia, or even dictatorships. If we are accidents, and the fittest survive, it really doesn’t matter what we do with people. We have

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

no reason to value life except that the majority tends to like it. But there are cultures where the majority doesn't value it. The secular answer has no basis on which to disagree.

◆ Still, like Solomon in Ecclesiastes, people everywhere discover spiritual need: they wonder about such non-empirical things as meaning, love, value, God. Where does this come from? Why do we find a void? Tim Keller writes:

◆ “Evolutionists say that if God makes sense to us, it is not because he is really there, it's only because that belief helped us survive and so we are hardwired for it. However, if we can't trust our belief-forming faculties to tell us the truth about God, why should we trust them to tell us the truth about anything, including evolutionary science? If our cognitive faculties only tell us what we need to survive, not what is *true*, why trust them about anything at all?”

◆ *The fact remains that mankind thirsts for truth and meaning that the things of this world do not fulfill. While it doesn't prove the existence of God, it is a good clue that we were made for something more.*

◆ B. In contrast, the biblical writings assert that each person has value because each person was created on purpose for purposes of Almighty God himself. If we accept the existence of the God of scriptures, we have good reason to hold to such things as morality, meaning, love, and value.

◆ *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:11, NIV.*

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

◆ Deep inside of us all is an awareness of something more to your existence. WHY?

◆ “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10, NIV.

◆ “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Psalms 139:16, NIV.

◆ If these things are true, we have a very good reason for protecting the down trodden, insuring someone’s right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” or for saying a person has value or even rights. If there is a God who made us, then we all have a purpose, and are valued and wanted. If not, if we are all mere accidents of nature, well then, we don’t have any basis for asserting such things as freedom, meaning, or value. Yet while many say they believe we are without purpose, few if any can actually live that way. Keller goes on:

◆ “The theory that there is a God who made the world accounts for the evidence we see better than the theory that there is no God. Those who argue against the existence of God go right on using induction, language, and their cognitive faculties, all of which make far more sense in a universe in which a God has created and supports them all by his power.”

◆ C. If there is a God who made you, and you have a purpose, then aligning yourself with him is in your best interest. Let me ask how many men in the room will admit to having used a screwdriver for a hammer at one time or other? After all it’s better than your hand. But of course it’s

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

just not a hammer, can't even compare, right? And you get all those little gouges in the handle from the nails and it's never comfortable to screw things with after that. When we are living out of line with our purposes, that's what happens to us! Therefore, to "believe in God", to live in line with him, makes good sense.

◆ Conclusion:

◆ Seventeenth Century philosopher and mathematician, Pascal, put forth what has been called Pascal's Wager: Pascal argued that a rational person should live as though God exists and seek to believe in God. If God does not actually exist, such a person will have only a finite loss (some pleasures, luxury, etc.), whereas they stand to receive infinite gains (as represented by eternity in [Heaven](#)) and avoid infinite losses (eternity in [Hell](#)). Dave Stroder writes something similar. He says, "the theory that a powerful deity created the world brings the most logical explanation to the issues of design, morality, and the soul. If an omnipotent, wise and intelligent God created the natural universe, then we can understand why the world has beauty, music, balance, and order. If a holy God created humanity in his own image, then we know why there is a moral code programmed in our conscience. If a personal God desires a relationship with his creation, then we can recognize where the longing in the human soul originates and why nothing in this world will satisfy it's yearning." But, you see, if this is not the case mankind has no reasonable explanation for any of these things like a sense of beauty, a moral code, of a longing in the soul. And if there is no God, the people of Malachi's day really have no reason to care about their marriages, the religious practices, sharing,

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD, ECCL.1

giving, or hoping for any kind of future. But as we will see in the book, there is a God and there are good reasons to be paying attention to him.