

▸ 6. The Existence of God

John Warwick Montgomery, “*Sensible Christianity*” [audio series]

Outline by Scott L. Klein (Concordia Univ. Irvine, Fall 1996); ed. Jenn Herzberg (Concordia Univ. Irvine, Fall 2001)

I. ▸ **Some Basic Caveats**

- A. ▸ The existence of God is *not* necessarily the best starting point when dealing with a non-Christian.
 - 1. ▸ Even if you can successfully address the existence of God for the non-Christian, there is still a *huge gap* between that and the Gospel.
 - a. ▸ Believing in God doesn’t save anybody!
 - i. ▸ Muslims believe in God.
 - ii. ▸ Buddhists may believe in “god.”
 - 2. ▸ Salvation comes from God in Christ—*not* from any non-specific “god.”
 - a. ▸ Christian must present the case for Jesus Christ in order to “get people to the cross.”
 - i. ▸ In any religious discussion, we should bring the subject over the question of Christ as soon as possible.
 - ii. ▸ When the non-Christian wants to discuss God, you do so.
 - iii. ▸ But you do this in the *most concrete way* you can (which is in Christ, the God-man).
 - 3. ▸ The demonstration of God is best handled in Christ.
- B. ▸ How does the Bible do Apologetics?
 - 1. ▸ Four arguments in the Bible on the behalf of Christian truth:
 - a. ▸ What is it that the Bible is defending? Answer: The *Word*—in it’s three-fold sense.
 - i. ▸ Christ Himself as the Word (Jn. 1>1)
 - ii. ▸ the Word of the Gospel, [and finally]
 - iii. ▸ all of Scripture as Word of God
 - b. ▸ These meanings blend together in four ways:
 - i. ▸ **Miracle** (the *fundamental* argument in the Bible)
 - (1). ▸ The sign of Jonah (Christ’s resurrection) is the *central argument* for the truth of Christ’s claims.
 - (2). ▸ Christ’s claims are at the center of the Biblical message
 - ii. ▸ **Prophecy** (the use of O’T passages as demonstrating the truth of the Christian faith as it was written)
 - iii. ▸ **Inner experience** (what philosophers call “subjective immediacy”)
 - (1). ▸ = the inner assurance that the Biblical text asserts the truth.
 - iv. ▸ **Natural theology**
 - (1). ▸ Evidence from nature that there is a God, and that the Biblical claim is correct
 - (2). ▸ Example: “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps. 19:1-4)
 - (3). ▸ But the Bible focuses its attention on *revelational* evidence.
 - c. ▸ Notice that miracle, prophecy and natural theology differ radically from the argument of “subjective immediacy.”

- i. ▶ Arguments from miracle, prophecy, and natural theology are objective arguments while inner experience is a subjective argument
- ii. ▶ Your objective: to get the non-Christian to see that the truth of the Gospel is *not* dependent upon the inner feelings of the presenter.
- iii. ▶ Example of “objective” proposition: “There are 43 chairs in the room.”
 - (1). ▶ statement can be tested out simply by physically counting the chairs
 - (2). ▶ And notice that it makes absolutely *no difference* how one feels (emotionally) about these chairs.
- iv. ▶ Contrast “subjective” propositions: The basis of the argument is directly *dependent* upon the presenter’s own perception of the situation.
 - (1). ▶ Example: “There is a purple elephant sitting next to me eating an ice-cream cone.”
 - (2). ▶ While the statement *appears* to be “objective” in form, it will soon be surmised after long examination of my immediate area that there isn’t a purple elephant sitting next to me and that I must, therefore, be seeing something that others do not see.
 - (3). ▶ Note: Statements such as “The Holy Spirit spoke to me” are purely subjective statements which cannot be tested by any objective means.
- v. ▶ In Scripture, subjective statement concerning God in Scripture is always supported by one of the three objective arguments discussed above (Acts 26)
 - (1). ▶ It is very dangerous to try to prove to the non-Christian, in an apologetic manner, the existence of God by means of subjective testimony.

II. ▶ Does God Exist?

- A. ▶ Most have heard of the “classic proofs” for the existence of God
 - 1. ▶ example: the causal argument: “Every effect must have a cause”
 - a. ▶ “There must, however, be a First Cause, and this First Cause is God”
- B. ▶ The Argument from Contingency (that is, “dependency”)
 - 1. ▶ The universe as we experience it consists *entirely* of dependent “stuff”
 - 2. ▶ That is, it requires an appeal from something *beyond itself* if it is to be explained.
 - a. ▶ *No* single element of the universe is self-explanatory.
 - 3. ▶ But we cannot stop with contingencies. We must provide some sort of *explanation* for these contingencies.
 - 4. ▶ That which *explains* the universe is God.
 - a. ▶ *Nothing* in this world can be explained by reference *only to itself*.
 - b. ▶ We must go *beyond* this world to explain it.
- C. ▶ The “Second Law of Thermodynamics”
 - 1. ▶ is an illustration of “the argument for contingency”
 - 2. ▶ The “Second Law of Thermodynamics” views the world solely from the standpoint of *energy*.
 - 3. ▶ By looking at the world from the standpoint of energy, one concludes that the *world began a finite time ago*.
 - a. ▶ What happens to available energy in closed system?
 - i. ▶ The available heat energy will decline until it reaches zero (“absolute entropy”).
 - b. ▶ In a closed system, entropy increases with time.

- c. ▶ Example: an automobile with gas in the tank
 - i. ▶ As the auto consumes the gasoline, it will eventually consume all the gas and then stop running.
- d. ▶ The Second Law of Thermodynamics applied to the universe:
 - i. ▶ The atheist surmises that the universe has been around for an infinite amount of time.
 - ii. ▶ But since the Second Law of Thermodynamics dictates that the universe *could not* have existed from infinity/eternity, it means that the universe does have an origin
 - iii. ▶ More than enough time has passed so that the energy that propels the universe would have been expended and already have caused “heat death.”
 - iv. ▶ Conclusion: There is something the matter with the assumption of the atheist.
 - (1). ▶ It is clear that either (1) the universe is not infinite, or (2) there is something outside of the universe feeding energy into it.
 - v. ▶ If the universe operated within the parameters of the atheist’s paradigm, then the universe would have *ceased operation* long ago.
- 4. ▶ “But what about those who hold to the theory that the universe operates within a steady state?”
 - a. ▶ The evidence (based upon the “Second Law of Thermodynamics”) suggests otherwise
 - b. ▶ This means that the burden of proof lies on the one who suggests that the universe is something other than what it is known to be.

III. ▶ **Is it Sensible to Even Talk about God?**

- A. ▶ In contemporary philosophy, there are those who maintain that it *does not make sense to even argue* the existence of God!
- B. ▶ Claim: “The notion of God is nonsensical”
 - 1. ▶ viewpoint is predominant in “analytical philosophy”
 - 2. ▶ The analytic philosopher maintains that the idea of the absolute uniqueness of God makes the concept of “God” “nonsensical.”
- C. ▶ The “Flew/Wisdom parable”
 - 1. ▶ Two explorers find a clearing a jungle where there are growing many flowers *and* many weeds.
 - a. ▶ (The two explorers represent believers and non-believers)
 - 2. ▶ The main question in the parable: If there *is* order in this garden, does someone come to tend the plot?
 - a. ▶ Believer says, “Yes” [and]
 - b. ▶ Unbeliever says, “No”
 - 3. ▶ So they set up watch to see who is right.
 - a. ▶ But they never see anyone come to take care of the garden.
 - b. ▶ However, they remember H.G. Well’s “Invisible Man”; perhaps the Gardener is invisible?
 - c. ▶ So they then set up a perimeter with an electric fence and patrol with bloodhounds. But there are no shrieks, nor do the bloodhounds ever bay.
 - 4. ▶ The unbeliever concludes that his hypothesis is right (“There is no gardener!”)
 - 5. ▶ But the believer maintains his hypothesis *anyway* (“There *is* a Gardener!”)

6. ▶ Believer claims that there *is* a gardener (invisible, intangible, having no scent and insensitive to electric shocks) who comes secretly to take care of his beloved garden.
7. ▶ The unbeliever's response: "What exactly is the difference between *that* kind of gardener and an *imaginary* one?!"
8. ▶ The point: if there is no way that the existence of God causes a testable difference in the objective world, what is the difference between this kind of a "god" and no god at all?
 - a. ▶ "the death by a thousand qualifications" (Antony Flew)
9. ▶ The question, then, is: "How can one recognize God?"
 - a. ▶ "Philosophical" response:
 - i. ▶ Argument in essence: Uniqueness cannot be properly described (you will never do it justice).
 - ii. ▶ And God is *not* the *only unique item* around (leaves on trees, snowflakes, etc)
 - (1). ▶ is common to describe historical events as being "unique"
 - (2). ▶ Still, there is no problem in *discussing* these "unique" events.
 - iii. ▶ In order to describe uniqueness, one must himself *transcend* the event.
 - (1). ▶ Otherwise, the person blends into the situation, and any "account" is then necessarily ambiguous.
 - (2). ▶ The distinction between "the observer" (subject) and "the observed" (object) is lost.
 - b. ▶ "Theological" response:
 - i. ▶ In all religions other than Christianity, God *does not* appear on earth.
 - (1). ▶ Since they cannot define God by pointing to Him, they define him solely by negatives or qualifications.
 - ii. ▶ Contemporary Christian theology is victim to this (they are actually *afraid* of the Incarnation of Christ).
 - iii. ▶ But historic Christianity does *not* fall victim to this at all!
 - (1). ▶ It points directly to Christ, God incarnate on earth.
 - (2). ▶ When "defining God," point to Christ!
 - iv. ▶ By introducing the non-believer to Christ, it will be Christ who will reveal the other aspects of His "Godhood" to the new believer (e.g., the Trinity)