

If I were to ask you, why you believe in God... there would probably be as many answers as there are people in the room. According to an article in the Seattle Times, Oxford University just got a 4 million dollar research grant to do a three year scientific study into why people believe in God. Their premise is that there is something inherent in the make-up of our human species that predisposes us toward belief in God. No kidding. Its called having a soul. People have a spiritual dimension to their beings.

They are going to spend all that money... not on trying to prove the existence of God, but trying to figure out why people believe in God – well, to give them a little leg up on their study, how about because its true. Last week we talked about the standard of proof in our judicial system as being beyond a reasonable doubt. Not beyond a shadow of a doubt. But beyond a reasonable doubt. Our world doesn't operate on the basis of absolute certainty, but rather on high probability. We have grown accustomed to being reasonable people, based on the best evidence we have at the time.

So let's apply that to the existence of God. What kind of evidence do we have that would tip the scales of probability to the point where a person would say... "I am convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that there is in fact a God."

I think there are four distinct ways you could come at that question.

The first is simply observation. You look around and notice there is stuff. And so you ask how did all this stuff get here. What is the explanation for the existence of stuff. You look out the window and see some trees and bushes, sky, clouds, you go places in the world and there are different kinds of animals, and people, Where did it ultimately come from? Why is there something as opposed to nothing?

The second thing you observe is that nothing in the material world appears to be self-caused...everything seems to be dependent on something else for its existence. Scientists would say that physical things are by nature contingent. Nothing is self-reliant. At some point in time whatever stuff you may be talking about, did not exist... and at some point in the future, that stuff won't continue to exist.

Those are simply the laws of thermodynamics which says that everything in our universe is in a gradual state of entropy, fading away, slowly disintegrating, including human beings. Compare your high school graduation picture with your current driver's license picture and you'll see what I am talking about.

So, the first observation notes that there is stuff in existence. Second observation is that all that exists seems to be dependent on something else, and it seems to be fragile and fading. And that now leads to the third notion,

the big question.

What is the explanation behind this dependent, contingent stuff that exists? What is the reason for it being here?

By way of illustration - take this hula hoop here – suppose that everything that exists in the universe is located inside this circle. All the material stuff of the universe, right in here. We've already observed that all this stuff is contingent. It depends on something else for its existence. And it's slowly heading towards non-existence. So the answer to our big question of what caused it all in the first place lies one of two places... either inside the circle itself or outside the circle. An atheist would have to claim the ultimate cause of everything is indeed inside the circle cause that's all there is. Christianity on the other hand claims that the ultimate cause of everything exists outside the circle. Now let's be reasonable. What makes the best sense?

If it is true that everything inside the circle is, as we said, contingent and dependent and transitory and fading, how reasonable it to locate the ultimate cause of everything inside the circle... where, by definition, nothing is self-caused, nothing is self-reliant or non-contingent?

Doesn't a reasonable person have to conclude that the answer of the explanation for all that exists inside the circle must be -- where?-- outside

the circle?

St. Augustine writing in the 5th century, said, "One can know what God is not; one cannot know what he is." That would certainly make sense materially speaking. You can look at everything in the world and say, well that is not God... or God is more than that. We're not talking here about love or values or spiritual insights... but of the stuff inside the circle, we can conclude with St Augustine, that this or that is not God. We also know that all this stuff couldn't have just occurred on its own. Nothing can come from nothing. It's a law of physics you can't ignore. But as you look around, its hard to ignore that something had to.

So I am convinced that somehow an intelligence, without a beginning itself, had to be involved as the main factor in the making of the universe.

All I would ask of anybody in this discussion is to be reasonable. Its not absolute evidence beyond a shadow of a doubt... but beyond a reasonable doubt, we are getting close.

Contemporary physicist Stephen Hawkins, an avowed atheist says this: "The universe expanded a million, million, million, times in a fraction of second. It produced all the contents of the universe quite literally out of nothing. When the universe was a single point, it contained nothing. It now contains 10 to the 28th particles in the part of the universe we can observe.

My theory tells you how it began. I still don't know why."

If Hawkins is right and all matter came from a momentary burst of energy, as Christians we believe the ultimate source of that energy was the command of God. The Bible puts it like this. Hebrews 11:3 "It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's command, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen." Not bad physics for a guy 2,000 years ago.

Albert Einstein himself said, "I dance to the tune of an invisible Piper. He stands behind the universe. He is God." I have always thought Einstein to be a reasonable person.

And when you are reasonable and you ask the question, what is the explanation for that which exists, you too would have to conclude it must come from outside the circle.

The second way to get at the question of God's existence is to look at the end product of the universe as it exists today and wonder if it happened by chance or by design. You look at the symmetry and the coordination and the intricacies and the processes and the irreducible complexities and you wonder what's responsible for that? Philosopher William Paley wrote, "There simply cannot be a design without a" -- what? -- "without a designer." It just makes no sense. You cannot have street art without a street

artist. You can't have a contrivance without a contriver. You can't have a pot without a potter.

“Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen, they are perceived in the things that God has made.”

Romans 1:20

If you take God completely out of the equation... and try to put together a world view in which there is no grand designer... what are you left with... sheer chance, randomness. Everything in the world is a result of a huge cosmic accident that luckily worked out for us so that we got to be here for a few years in the vast expanse of what would otherwise be naught.

Without God, all you are left with is that at some point a chance collision of floating gases set in motion a random series of events that over billions of years finally brought us to where we are today. That is the position of scientism as described last week. I have the transcripts of the three sermons in this series so far on our website.

Let's consider for a moment how reasonable is that theory? How reasonable is it that a chance collision of mysterious gases, which no physicist can adequately explain where they came from in the first place – if you are going to have a big bang, you have to have some stuff there to bang into each other, how reasonable is it that by chance and a random series of

events, you end up with micro-systems as complex as the human body and macro-systems as far-reaching as the universe, or even parallel universes...

To my thinking, a random chance explanation for all of what we see is just highly unlikely. It doesn't pass the standard test of reason. Whenever, wherever there is purpose and order and design in structure, reasonable people know someone was responsible for it.

Perhaps you have seen this illustration. If you were to put a chimpanzee in front of a computer terminal and have it hit keys at random... what are the odds that it could type the words, It happened by chance. (21 letters with spacing) in the right order. If the chimp begins to type and you remove the paper each time it makes a mistake, it would take four billion generations of chimps to accomplish that simple feat. Stack the paper in a book and it would reach 3,250 million, million, million, million miles, (325 x 10²⁵) extending beyond the assumed diameter of the universe. And yet the odds that the chemical design of the human body fell into place by chance are far greater than this. All I am asking for in the conversation is for people to be reasonable.

Charles Darwin himself, the kingpin of evolutionary theory, much of his writing I find to be reasonable and compelling, but even he has to finally admit that when it comes to pure chance, he can't totally buy it... check out

this quote from his Origin of Species book, "To suppose that the human eye with so many parts all working together could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree." Unquote.

Even Charles Darwin has to be reasonable enough to suggest that it would have taken an intelligent creator to set in process the development of a human eye or the navigation system of a homing pigeon or the spinning ability of a spider.

In an Associated Press report on a recent conference sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science: "What caused biology to begin remains one of the primary puzzles of science, with the prospect that structures as complex as the 6 billion-unit strand of human DNA could arise from chance alone seeming phenomenally improbable."

All I'm asking of our scientifically minded generation today is to determine in your own heart, be honest with yourself. (have a person stand up or pick up a child) Can you really buy that something this magnificent and beautiful, and self aware, and complex and intelligent is the result of a cosmic accident and a random series of events?

Sheer chance cannot have resulted or produced all of what we see. Reasonable people cannot hold that position. And as has been said numerous times by scholars and thinkers across many disciplines, much more faith is

required to attribute the wonders of our world to a random event and happenchance string of processes than to accept the existence of an eternal, intelligent, all-powerful designer God.

And now we are going to shift gears a little, as we look at third way to talk about why there must be God behind it all.

III. Human values. If you take God out of the equation, how exactly do you account for people's basic sense of right and wrong?

How do you account for the fact that in human nature worldwide -- regardless of what continent, culture or language or color or time in history-- in humankind worldwide, there is a kind of moral code stamped on the hearts of human beings. There are some ideas of how people should treat each other that calls the individual into account. If there is no divine purpose to the world, how do you account for the fact that in almost every single culture in the world, there is a preference for honor, courage, compassion, common sense, dignity loyalty respect, fairness over their opposites. Why is that? What accounts for that?

Why do we care about Darfur... or what happens to Iraq when we pull out? Why is Richard so excited to lend his money to people he doesn't know on the other side of the world to buy a cow. Why do some of you leave your home on a Thursday night to serve dinner to poor people at

church? Why did over 40 youth and adults in our church go without eating this weekend to raise money and awareness of World Hunger? Why did you give them ??? to support world vision? Why do so many of us care about what happens to other people who aren't even our friends or members of our family? Why will many of you stuff your hard earned money into the offering boxes in the back - of your own free will?

Because as human beings, whom the Bible claims have been created in God's image, we seem to have an intuitive sense of what is the right way for people to behave? Is a randomly evolving gene pool capable of creating a moral code of values in people worldwide -- one that is remarkably consistent, even though billions of people have existed for millions of years and were for so long separated by oceans and continents and customs and world views and so on?

As Christians we believe God expressed his moral code for human behavior in the books of the Bible, the Law, the ten commandments, but even within that conceptual framework, the apostle Paul recognized that there is a God-given moral code that extends to all people quite apart from anything the scriptures had to say. Here is what Paul wrote... *"The Gentiles do not have the Law; but whenever they do by instinct what the Law commands, they are their own law... Their conduct shows that what the Law*

commands is written on their hearts. Their consciences show that this is true...” Romans 2:2.

The Jews were wondering how God could judge people who didn't know better, who didn't have the Old Testament law. Paul is appealing here to this universal sense of rightness... a conscience, a feeling in one's heart about how people should behave.

There are a number of non-believers who have a problem with the pledge of allegiance, that they have to say, “one nation under God,” They argue that its not fair to those who don't believe. Its not right. But if they don't think that people are created in the image of a moral God... there is no moral law stamped on the hearts of human beings... where does the fairness come from they are appealing to? Where does the universal sense of rightness emanate?

I mean, the irony of that always gets me... I want to say, "Time out." You can't have it both ways. Why do you think you care so much? Where does that come from? Why do you care who has to do what or say what. If you're saying there's no God, then how do you explain this feeling that things should be fair? This is the line of reasoning that used to always get my step dad to stop and ponder.

Sometimes he would just appeal to love. I care about people because

I love people... it has nothing to do with God or a universal moral code, just the human feeling of love.

“...love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

I John 4:7-8

That's what believer's have said generations... Love comes from God. Try it sometime when somebody, who doesn't believe in God, tries to get you to support their good cause. Ask them, Why do you care? Where does that come from? If you don't believe the God thing, then what is it?"

If you want to explore this idea further, author C. S. Lewis drives home the moral argument in his book Mere Christianity.

Finally, I'll touch on just one more way of coming at the question of the existence of God... and that is the argument based on religious experience. What we are talking about here is literally centuries of documented spiritual experiences of people such as feeling the presence of God or receiving guidance from God or feeling strengthened by God or having visions from God, or incredible happenings, miracles attributed to God... many of us here in this room can talk of spiritual experiences that we have had... and so we have to ask, where does that come from. Author Ron Nash goes so far as to say, “religious experiences must be taken very

seriously as evidence of the existence of God --now here's the caveat -- provided that the person making the experiential claim is widely known to be a trustworthy person.”

What he's driving at is that hundreds of millions of intelligent, well-adjusted, non-crack using people all over the world --including presidents, chief justices, scientists, sociologists, economists, as well as honorable butchers and bakers and candlestickmakers -- claim that they experience the love of God. Or that they experience the forgiveness of God in the removal of guilt and shame. Or that they experience the peace of God or the comfort of God. Given the credibility of these witnesses, this cannot and should not be taken lightly. If you have experienced God in your life, raise your hand.

When it comes to arguing for the existence of God, you can't ignore that. When you guys come here Sunday after Sunday to worship are you making it up... no... God is real to you. Beyond a reasonable doubt.

The Apostle Paul, used to be Saul, killer of Christians, until he had a religious experience that changed his life... he describes it in Acts 22:6-8

“As I was traveling and coming near Damascus, about midday a bright light from the sky flashed suddenly around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth...’”

And he would never be the same again... because of that event in

which he met Jesus, years after he had been crucified and Risen... Paul went on to be the greatest Christian witness and evangelist the world has ever seen. Do you think he was convinced in his personal experience beyond a reasonable doubt? In order to completely change his life? How do you account for that?

How do we account for the fact that today, hundreds of millions of people-- who are not hallucinating, who are not lying, who are not delusive types -- how is it that so many people these days all around the world are experiencing God? All I am saying is that when someone's weighing all the evidence in an attempt to determine whether or not God exists, whether or not belief in God is a reasonable position to hold, add the religious experience argument to the cosmological argument, the teleological argument and the moral argument -- put it all on the scale -- and then watch the scale tip in favor of God.

To every one of you who has ever been challenged or ridiculed or made to feel defensive because you believe in God... you need to stand up... and stand tall. It is the person who tries to take God out of the equation that has most of the explaining to do. In fact it doesn't even make sense. Roger Trigg, of the Oxford Research grant, wrote: "anthropological and philosophical research suggests that faith in God is a universal human

impulse found in most cultures around the world... One implication that comes from this is that religion is the default position, and atheism is perhaps more in need of explanation." Interesting.

Reasonable people are led to the position that God was the cause of all that exists inside the circle -- that God was the designer of the complexities of the world -- that God put in process the moral sense of rightness and wrongness in people, right in their genetic code, that God is still coming near to people and touching their lives today. Next week, we are going to apply the same criteria of reasonableness, to the question of life after death? When you close your eyes for the last time, and you take your final breath, and your brain waves go flat... will there be something or nothing... and how can you know for sure, or at least beyond a reasonable doubt?