

## *Why Attempt the Futile?*

Many well-intentioned believers, in their desire to evangelise, try, by using rational argument, to convince unbelievers of the existence of God, and that he created the universe.

I say that this is unnecessary. What is more, the effort is misguided; at the very least, it is without scriptural warrant. Hence the ‘futile’ in my chosen title.

The Bible never attempts to prove the existence of God, or that he created the universe. Never! Rather, it categorically asserts both. And it does so right from the word ‘go’:

In the beginning, God...

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

That’s how the Bible opens (Gen. 1:1). And it never looks back!

God is adamant: he has given all men without exception clear, sufficient and undeniable evidence of his existence and his creating power:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth (Ps. 19:1-6).

Working on that premise, axiom, assertion, revelation – that God exists, and that he created the universe – the Bible goes on to insist that men must accept it, and act upon it. If not, says God, they are fools:

The fool says in his heart: ‘There is no God’ (Ps. 53:1).

And God pulls no punches about the dire consequences which stem directly from that foolish denial:

The fool says in his heart: 'There is no God'. They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one (Ps. 53:1-3).

God could not be more blunt in his repetition of the stark fact which had been set out earlier in the Psalms:

The wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are: 'There is no God' (Ps. 10:3-4).

The fool says in his heart: 'There is no God'. They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one (Ps. 14:1-3).

Indeed, as Paul declares, the natural man is guilty before God and under his wrath because, being fallen in Adam, although he knows full-well that God exists and that he created the universe, he deliberately stifles that knowledge, refuses to act upon it, deliberately and arrogantly substituting a god of his own making to replace the one true and living God:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the

immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (Rom. 1:18-22).

So let's not beat about the bush! Although, like the Bible, I talk about believers and unbelievers – meaning those who trust in Christ, and those who do not – in reality, all men and women really are believers. Some believe God exists and that he created the universe; some do not. But we all believe: we either believe that God exists, or we believe that he does not. The question of proof does not arise! It is all a matter of faith.

So don't let the so-called atheists kid themselves. We are all believers! They are! Those who reject the God of Scripture, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and prefer to talk about luck, chance or fate, bowing down to any other god whatsoever, or claiming there is no god at all, are still believers. The truth is, they have more faith than those of us who submit to the living God who created the universe, and, above all, who trust his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for our salvation. They need it! It demands far more faith to rely upon blind chance than to trust in the Redeemer, the incarnate Son of the everlasting God!

Consequently, what we believers should be concerned about is not trying, by rational argument,<sup>1</sup> to convince men that God exists, and that he created the universe: in their heart of hearts, all men know that already! No! Like Paul, we should be challenging their denial of God, challenging their suppression of the knowledge of God. Furthermore, we should resolutely assert God's rights and claims over created men, we should preach his gospel, offer sinners salvation through trust in Christ, demanding their repentance towards God over their rebellion against him,

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<sup>1</sup> Logical arguments are like sharp knives: there is a risk that they will cut the user. Remember the Socratic Club meeting in Oxford in 1948 where C.S.Lewis' logic was routed by Elizabeth Anscombe! Take one example. The system we see in creation demands a designer. Very well. But who designed the designer? In short, the argument has not advanced the case at all; it has merely shifted it. As I have said, the existence of God is not a question of proof; from first to last it is a matter of faith.

their stifling of their knowledge of him, and their consequent sins. After all, this is precisely what Christ insisted on:

Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his [that is, Christ's] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

And which Paul certainly did:

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21; see also Acts 2:38; 26:18-20).

So let's not waste our time attempting the futile – trying to prove God's existence. Let us get on asserting him and demanding obedience to him. That is what the Bible does; it demands submission to the evidence, the evidence which in their hearts all men know to be true, but deliberately suppress:

Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Heb. 11:6).

What is more – and finally – one day everyone will have to acknowledge what they know in their hearts:

God highly exalted [the Lord Jesus Christ], and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

I close with this personal address to all who read these words: self-styled atheist, agnostic, or whatever you like to call yourself, that which I have just quoted from Scripture is what you will do, and do one day soon. You will have to openly acknowledge what you have always known to be true, but what you are determined to suppress: that God exists and that he created you; that consequently you owe him your worship and obedience; and that you are accountable to him. All that, in the final day, you will acknowledge. But it will not be saving. I urge you, therefore, to

bow the knee to God *now*, submitting yourself to him. I plead with you to repent and trust Christ, and do it without delay.