

I. Theism: The World from God’s Hand

God.

Coming to a conclusion about the “God” question is the central issue in life. More consequences in your life come from your view of God than from anything else you believe. And you cannot be neutral about God, either. You can’t say, “It doesn’t matter if God exists,” because it matters ultimately. Once you acknowledge God’s existence you are forced to ask, “What does this mean for me?” because you have set your life on a trajectory that is completely different than if you deny God’s existence.

In this session we’re going to talk about God. Remember, the other two worldviews we discussed do not actually hold to a belief in God. Naturalism rejects the existence of God or anything that is not completely physical. Transcendentalism in a different way comes to similar conclusions about life. Those who believe in Transcendentalism may say they believe in God, but remember it’s a “god” with quotes. God is a power or a force to be used, not a divine being to be loved and worshipped.

II. The Focus of Theism: The Existence of God

A. The Challenges to God’s Existence

So we come to the third of the major worldviews. We call this worldview “Theism”, a word which comes from the Greek which literally means “godism”. Those who hold to Theism believe that there is a God who created everything that exists. They believe God is all-powerful, and yet, God also is the kind of being you can relate to, talk to, and love. In fact, loving God expresses the reason He made us.

Some of you listening to me right now aren’t certain of your belief in the existence of God. Maybe you’ve been disappointed by the behavior or lifestyle of someone who says they believe in God. Maybe you look around at many of the believers in the world and say, “Not me, I’m not one of them, and I don’t want to be one of them.” Well, let me encourage you that this is a question that is between you and God. Don’t let people around you distract you from finding truth.

Or maybe you struggle with the fact that there is evil and suffering in the world. Maybe you have asked, “How can a good God exist when there is so much evil in

the world? Why would a good God allow such innocent suffering? If I were God, I wouldn't let it happen."

B. The Answers to the Challenges

These are good questions and good points. But don't blame God for the actions of evil people. Plus, the story is not over yet. I don't think there are easy solutions to the problem of evil, but there are resolutions. A lot of intelligent people have spent time thinking and writing about all of this. We have some resources available for you, and they are listed in the curriculum guide.

Or maybe you are just one of those who say, "I don't want there to be a God. I don't want to be accountable for my life."

Well, if that's the case, there is really nothing anybody can do or say to change your mind.

Even if you are a skeptic or an atheist, you have to acknowledge that a lot of brilliant people throughout history have enthusiastically come to the conclusion that God exists. If I were you, I would ask, "why?" Let me explain to you why so many intelligent people do believe in the existence of God. For one, the existence of God explains the existence of everything else. You and I understand what it means to be creative and the very fact that anything exists at all could lead many thinking people to believe that Someone brought it into existence.

Second, it is more than just the existence, but the way everything exists; the design and orderliness of the universe is incredible. If everything began from a chaotic mass of matter, how did everything become so well-defined and designed? Why do the physical laws allow us to understand the physical universe so well? How about the laws of biology and chemistry? Why are they so fine-tuned? An atheist may say, "Well, it just happened." And that's fine and good, but you understand why a brilliant thinking person would conclude that whenever you see evidence of design you automatically think of the Designer. It is not unlike seeing huge white stones arranged on the outskirts of a city in such a way they read "Welcome to Seattle." You could certainly say these stones randomly arranged themselves to spell out this message. Or, you might think that the Seattle Chamber of Commerce was at work again.

Third, the existence of God explains the existence of humans. It is one thing to look at the inanimate universe of stars and quasars, planets and comets. But where did we come from? Not only life in general, but human life? How did creatures with such intelligence, morality, and sense of purpose arise from lifeless matter? Again you see why many brilliant, thinking people conclude that we are brought into existence by an intelligent, moral, and purposeful God.

Besides, if there is no meaning of life, where did the concept of meaning even come from?

Believing in the existence of God also explains why every culture that has ever existed has had some belief in a supreme being. Even more, believing in God gives us insight into why we have this sense of morality within us, and the core of this reality is basically the same throughout the world.

III. The Consequences of Believing in God

So believing in God is not putting your brain in neutral; it's actually putting your brain in overdrive. In fact, as Augustine once said, "I believe in order that I may understand." Acknowledging the existence of God is the first step in making sense of the world. It's amazing how things begin to fall into place.

Acknowledging God means that everything that exists was created by Him. It is His. You are His. So am I. Therefore, I am responsible and accountable to Him. It also means that right now God is watching over me and the world. I may not completely understand all that happens, but one day we will. I remember as a child I didn't quite grasp everything my parents did. But I loved them and I trusted them. As I grew older, I understood more. Now as an adult I look back and understand fully what I could not understand as a child.

Even more, believing in God means that we know the future is not out of control. There is a loving, heavenly Father who holds everything in His hands.

You or some of your friends may still struggle with believing in God. But let me encourage in this. You can sit and reason all day long. You can look at the evidence and listen to the arguments all day long, but there comes a point when you just have to decide. It's like playing hide and seek with your brother. If you wonder if Johnny is in the closet, you can come up with every argument possible to determine whether or not he's in the closet. Pretty soon you are just going to have to go look.

IV. The Three Theistic Religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity

There are many people who say they believe in God. In fact, there are three major religions in the world that hold to the belief in the kind of God I described. These religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three of these religions believe in a personal God who created the world and will judge each person after death.

But it is very obvious that just believing in God does not guarantee a world of peace and love. Some use their belief in God as a justification to impose what they believe to be God's standards on other people. Many of them use violent means. Even

some who call themselves Christians have taken this approach. It is clear that something is wrong with this approach.

So to say that we merely believe in God is not enough. Which God do you believe in? Many religions and people have created a God in their own image – A God who holds their own political philosophy or moral standard. They want to be able to say that their moral or social agenda comes from God and they are only carrying out His will.

V. Christus Nexus: “Christ at the Center”

With so many people creating their own God, how do we know what is true?

This is the good part, and it is so obvious. God has told us about Himself. God has not kept us groping in the darkness for some clue to existence. Nor has He kept us in the dark about the kind of person He is nor what He expects from us. Even more exciting, God has gone out of His way to let us know all that He has done for us to restore a relationship with Him.

For this reason, Jesus Christ becomes the watershed in our understanding of God. God has told us a lot about Himself in the Word; both in the written Word and the incarnate Word, the Bible and Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that God’s love for all He has created did not stop when mankind rebelled and fell into sin. In fact, our helplessness and rebellion seemed to spur on God’s love even more. He did not want us wondering what was right and wrong, what was true and false. That’s why He came down and became one of us, so He could communicate clearly and die. Why did He have to die? Because it was the only way to obliterate the consequences of our sin. After Jesus was dead and buried, He came back to life as proof of who He is and evidence that the debt was paid.

It’s important to see that Jesus Christ is not just a religious teacher or philosophical figure. He said He was God in the flesh. Everything that He did and said in His life affirms this. He forgave sins, He talked about judging the entire world, He healed the sick, and He raised the dead. He was an historical figure. What worldview best describes this historical person? Obviously it’s the Theistic worldview. Islam or Judaism has no room for the true historical person of Jesus. They must reinterpret His life to be something less than He really was.

Christianity is Jesus Christ. In fact, Christianity is following the person of Christ – not a lot of rules, or a book, or a philosophy. Christianity is Christ. Becoming a Christian is recognizing that God stepped into history to restore the broken relationship caused by sin. He made this happen through Jesus. Why did He do this? Because He loved us so much. God said He would rather die than live without you, so He did. You embrace Christ and accept God’s gift of forgiveness for your sin.

Now it seems the world makes sense. Now we understand why there is so much suffering and struggle in the world. We also understand how a loving God has responded through the sacrifice of His Son so we can put our lives together now and enjoy His incredible presence forever.

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