

THE CHALLENGE TO BELIEVE

In Luke 18 Jesus asked a searching question: “. . . when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (v. 8).

We live today in an age of turmoil and unrest. We cannot pick up our newspapers or listen to the radio or television without being made aware of this. Around the world we read of riots and revolutions. Everyone seems to have questions, but few have answers. Often the “old” is being cast aside with nothing permanent coming in to replace it, resulting in a chaotic vacuum.

In such an age, it is inevitable that beliefs which people once held near and dear will come under attack—including their faith. We have seen direct attacks on faith in *God*. Mankind has apparently reached the point that many no longer feel a great need for God. For instance, in one census, *atheism* was reported to be “the fastest growing religion in Australia.”

Continual attacks have been made on faith in the Bible. Modern schools of criticism pare away the Bible until really nothing is left. They scoff at the concept of supernatural inspiration.

Attacks on the deity of Jesus continue as well. These are more subtle, because many give lip-service to Jesus as a super-prophet, super-teacher, super-life, or superstar. When all is said and done, people who hold such views still do not recognize Jesus Christ as the Lord of life at whose feet every knee must bow.

One practical result of this skepticism has been the attack on any standard of right or wrong. People have invented “situation ethics.” No longer do we rely on the pronouncements of God, the Bible, or Christ on matters of right or wrong. Man has made *himself* the judge, and his only “law” is the “law of love.”

How appropriate, then, are the words of Christ in our age! “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8b).

In this lesson we want to ask an important question: “*Can* one believe in God, Christ, and

the Bible in the twenty-first century?” It is my purpose to affirm that faith is not outdated, that one *can* believe in biblical teachings in the twenty-first century!

This could be demonstrated in several ways, but I want to guide you along one line of thought—to suggest that it is *reasonable* to believe in the twenty-first century. Truth can never be fully discovered by reason alone; at the same time, when someone becomes a Christian, God does not expect him to stop thinking rationally and logically.

Our study will be constructed like a chain, a series of links connecting one with another. When we finish our study, you can look back at those clearly defined links and examine your *own* faith. At some point, you may say, “I can get this far and no farther.” Your “faith quotient” will have been pinpointed. Share that information with the one who gave you this publication; it will provide the basis for further study.

Now, let us focus on our subject. We can only *touch* on a variety of thoughts, but I hope that this arrangement will be helpful.

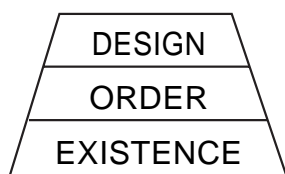
IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT THERE IS A GOD

Psalm 14:1a says, “The *fool* has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” (Emphasis mine; see also Psalm 53:1.) The writer here was not referring to a lack of intelligence, but to the foolishness of any man who will not open his eyes to the vast amount of evidence around him.

Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.” Romans 1:20 says, “For since the creation of the world His [God’s] invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

When I was a boy, speakers often used a simple illustration. They would pull off their watches and display them, insisting that just as the watch declares the existence of a watchmaker, so this world declares the existence of a Maker. The illustration has been used so often as to appear trite—but it is more profound than people realize.

If I were to develop a lengthy argument for the existence of God, I would begin by constructing a pyramid with three levels. I would label the base level (1) *Existence*. The level above that would be (2) *Order*, and the top level would be (3) *Design* or *Purpose*:



I will briefly explain each level, using the watch illustration:

Existence: The watch exists. It is here. Its presence is a reality. It had to come from somewhere.

Order: Not only does the watch exist, but it functions in an orderly fashion. It consists of various cogs, wheels, springs, and other parts put together and functioning as a single unit. As long as all parts are functioning properly, it operates in an orderly, measured way.

Design: Not only does this watch operate in an orderly fashion, but it also fulfills a *purpose* as it does so. Whoever made it had a definite function in mind for it, and it generally fulfills this purpose: It tells the time.

Even so, as we look at this universe, these are the three main lines of argument for believing in a Maker: (1) The universe *exists*. (2) Furthermore, it operates in an *orderly* fashion; we set our clocks by God's great heavenly timepieces. (3) *Design (purpose)* is seen in every blade of grass, in every tree.

The most common argument against the existence of God is actually against the top two levels: *Order* and *Design*. Someone may point to floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or perhaps to some personal tragedy in his own life. Because of these things, he concludes that there is no God. However, this does not necessarily follow.¹

Time does not permit us to examine each of these lines of thought in depth. We will therefore focus on the foundation of the pyramid—*Existence*.

Let us return to the illustration of the watch. What if you found a damaged watch lying on the footpath? Imagine that it has been dropped—perhaps even stepped on. It no longer keeps perfect time; it may not even run. *Does this mean that there is no longer a watchmaker?* No, the evidence is still there—clear and unmistakable—even in that damaged condition. The watch still *exists*.

If it exists, where did it come from?

It has been stated that there are just two types of existence: Mind and Matter. Since something cannot come from nothing, one must have been eternal and produced the other. Either Mind has always existed and produced Matter, or Matter has always existed and produced Mind. Since it is unthinkable that unliving, unthinking, amoral Matter could produce living, thinking, emotional Mind with a moral conscience, then it must have been the other way around: Eternal Mind must have produced Matter.

A friend of mine, Jim Waldron, illustrated this. He was on an airplane flying to Pakistan and found himself seated beside a Russian. They began to talk, and soon the conversation turned to religious matters. The Russian could not believe that God had made this world. Finally, Jim asked him, "In Russia, do little children make mud pies?" The man smiled and admitted that in Russia little children make mud pies.

Jim said, "This is interesting. In the part of the world from which I come, children also make mud pies. In fact, everywhere I've been in the world, children make mud pies. But one thing I've never seen: *I've never seen a mud pie making a little child.*"

The point was quickly made about "Mind" and "Matter." Mind has the capacity to manipulate and utilize Matter, but not the reverse. Jim concluded with a smile: "Personally, I find it far easier to believe in children making mud pies than in mud pies making children."

Since something is, something always had to be—because something cannot come from nothing. Has this world always been, or was it made at some point?

A few years ago, I greatly enjoyed reading a book entitled *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, written by forty scientists from various fields. I found it interesting that so many of them used proofs from their different fields of research to show that this universe is “running down.” It has been variously compared with a fire burning itself out, a top running down, and other illustrations. Any way you put it, two truths are evident: (1) The universe is *not* eternal, and (2) at some point it had a *beginning*.²

Since something cannot come from nothing, this again leaves us with a Force sufficient to account for the universe. This must be some kind of Eternal Mind—in other words, God.

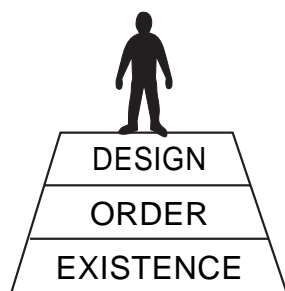
Look around you. Did the home where you live just happen? Hebrews 3:4 summarizes this point well: “For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.”³

IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT GOD MADE EVERYTHING

We have been pointing to the unmistakable signs that this universe has been *made* in order to show that it is reasonable to believe there is a *Maker*. Now, let us turn the thought around and look at it from the other direction: This Maker actually *made* the universe. It did not just happen by chance. It was made; it was ordered; it was *designed*.

Let us get to the heart of the matter. Since it is reasonable to believe that God made everything, *it is also reasonable to believe that God made man—that God made you and me.*

When I introduced the pyramid a short while ago, I refrained from applying these “evidences” to man himself. However, I consider the human being the finest example of what I was talking about.



Take a few moments to look at yourself. There is no machine like the human body. There

is no mechanical device like the human hand.⁴ There is no camera like the human eye. There is no pump like the human heart. There is no packaging arrangement like the self-cooling, self-healing human skin. There is no factory like the human internal organs. In the words of David, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).

Take the human mind as one example. We live in an age of amazing computers; but if you could build a computer big enough to fill every skyscraper in downtown New York City, they *still* could not begin to approach the potential, dexterity, or creativity of even a small child’s brain!

The theory of evolution says that we have evolved from lower forms of life. According to that theory, we have just developed our minds because we were not strong enough or fast enough or big enough to compete with the other animals on these levels—yet the truth is that we develop only *the smallest percentage* of the potential of the brains we have. Mankind’s advancement cannot be explained by any “survival” theory. The simple fact is that *God* gave us our minds; a Thinking Being made us to be thinking beings.

I repeat: It is reasonable to believe that God made man. It is much more reasonable to believe we have been made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) than in the image of an ancestral ape-like creature!

IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT GOD GAVE TO MAN A REVELATION

If God made this world, it is reasonable that He would give man information on where he came from, why he is here, and what life is about.

Imagine that you come home one day and on your front lawn you find a huge, gleaming piece of machinery. It is complicated, beautifully tooled, incorporating the most advanced discoveries; it is obviously designed for a very important function. However, there is no clue to its purpose, no book of instructions, no information printed on the machine. Let us say that you *never* find out what the apparatus was designed for. You would probably reach one of two conclusions: (1) Either the maker died before he could

reveal his purpose, or (2) the maker was crazy.

As we look at this world around us—far more intricate and complex than any machine ever made by man—we might also conclude that if the Maker has not communicated with us to tell us what life is about, He is either dead or crazy. God is neither! Hence we conclude that He *has* communicated, that the key words of Hebrews 1:1, 2 are perfectly reasonable: “God, . . . has spoken”

If God has communicated with us, this means that there *are* some *standards*, there *are* some things that are right or wrong. Man himself is *not* the standard. The Bible says, “A man’s way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

What *is* that communication? Various books today claim to be inspired by some Higher Power—all of them contradicting the others at various points. We need to pinpoint God’s revelation. Let us carry our thought one more step: *It is reasonable to believe that the revelation God gave to man is the Bible.*

Countless proofs point to the inspiration of the Bible: unity, antiquity, modernity, historical and geographical accuracy, fairness, influence, indestructibility, fulfilled prophecy, and others. Because of our time limitation, let us stay with the line of thought already started. Consider this: If God made the world, put man in the world, and then gave man a revelation, is it not reasonable that *the revelation given would be that which would best fit man to live in God’s world?*⁵

Look at the world as a whole. Identify those countries where man has prospered the most, where the needs of man have been the most adequately met, where human life is the most respected and protected. You will find that—in the past, at least—the *Bible* has had the most influence in those countries.⁶

The words of Paul have been proven true throughout the world: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for *every* good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; emphasis mine).

The Bible has within itself built-in proof of inspiration. If you have a problem believing that the Bible is really from God, I suggest that you go to the Book itself and really get acquainted with

it. Paul said, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

To illustrate, let us imagine that I am afraid of burglars and therefore keep a gun under my pillow. Let us further imagine that one night I awake to find an intruder in my room. I wish to frighten him away by impressing him with the potential of my gun. What can I do?

I can take at least two approaches. I can turn on the lights, show him my gun, and say, “Do you see this gun? It has a hollow barrel. Down at this end, a bullet fits in. The bullet has an exploding cap and gunpowder, with a lead pellet at the end. If I were to pull this trigger, it would activate the hammer at the back, which would strike the back of the bullet with great force, exploding the gunpowder and expelling the lead pellet through the barrel. It would then fly out of the barrel at great speed and put a big hole in you if I point it in your direction.”

On the other hand, I can fire a few shots into the air! Chances are, *that* will be much more effective!

We can talk a great deal *about* the Bible, but we need to keep in mind that the Bible is *powerful*. It is “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). It has changed the course of individual lives, nations, and history.

If you really desire the ultimate proof that the Bible is from God, give it a chance in your life. *Read* it. *Study* it. (I mean, *really* study it.) Apply it to your life. You will see, as J. B. Phillips would say, that it has that “ring of truth”!

IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT GOD LOVES MAN— AND DESIRES TO HELP HIM

As we look around at our world, we cannot help but be impressed with the fact that God is a *personal* God who is concerned with our every need. While I cannot fully understand it, God obviously *loves* us.

God could have made this world strictly functional—to satisfy the needs of the flesh and that only—but He did not. He made it beautiful. He made the flowers. He made the colorful birds. Everything He made was “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

In the Garden of Eden, God put every tree

that is (1) “*pleasing to the sight*” and (2) “*good for food*” (Genesis 2:9). When He made a “helper suitable” for man, He could have made a lump of flesh capable of bearing children. Instead, He made a beautiful creature to grace the life of man.

As we think of the needs of man, we come ultimately to moral and spiritual needs. Has not every person at some time or another felt spiritual longings? Can any person say that he has never fallen short of God’s standards? Has not every person at some time felt helpless and in need of One bigger than himself? The Bible says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Knowing, then, of God’s love and concern, we are not surprised to read of the spiritual provisions God has made for us. He has taken the punishment of sin upon Himself in the Person of His Son, and He has provided for continued spiritual help through Jesus. Let me simply say that, in light of God’s love, passages like these are reasonable:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, ... Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT GOD DESIRES A RESPONSE

Although God has provided for our spiritual well-being, He did not make us robots. He has given us instructions to obey, but He has also given us free will. He made us free moral agents; we have the right of choice. We can believe, or we can disbelieve. We can obey, or we can disobey. We can love, or we can hate.

God has given us evidence on which to base faith. He has expressed His love in countless ways. Is it unreasonable that He would desire from us the response of *faith, obedience, and love*?

- *Faith*: Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”
- *Obedience*: Hebrews 5:9 says that “He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.”
- *Love*: 1 John 4:8 says, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

God did not make us robots, for the response of robots is mechanical, automatic, meaningless. In contrast, the response of freewill agents has meaning.

When we consider everything that God has done for us, it is reasonable that He should desire—and expect—the response summarized in Galatians 5:6: “faith working through love.”

This discussion could be greatly expanded, because the New Testament is filled with specific information on the response desired—and required—by God. For now, though, let us close out this study with one last “link” in our line of thought.

IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT GOD WILL SOMEDAY CALL MAN TO GIVE AN ACCOUNTING

Everywhere around us, we find indications that this life is not all there is. Every race seems to have an inborn sense of immortality. Even those peoples who have become far removed from the true God have retained some concept of a life beyond this one.⁷

Concerning that life to come, it is reasonable to believe that God will call us to account for how we used what we were given in this life: the blessings, the opportunities, the challenges. We are told, “Moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

The Bible calls that time of accounting the “Judgment Day.” Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”

The concept of a judgment is, I believe, a reasonable one. In this life, so often “the books do not balance.” The wicked often prosper; the

good are often oppressed. The guilty often go free, while the innocent suffer. Surely, if there is a God, it is reasonable that one day wrongs will be righted and scores will be righteously settled.

This means that one day *you* will have to stand before God at that time when “each one of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12).

CONCLUSION

Here are the “links” in our chain of thought: It is reasonable to believe . . .

- that there is a God.
- that He made everything—and especially that He made man.
- that He gave to man a revelation—and that His revelation is the Bible.
- that He loves and helps man—helping him in a *spiritual* way through Christ.
- that He desires—and expects—a response.
- that man will ultimately be called before God to give an account for how he has used his physical and spiritual blessings and his opportunities.

What have *you* done lately to get ready for that day?

As we close this lesson, let us return to Jesus’ question: “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Let us, however, make the question more personal: “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith in *your* heart?” This, after all, is the most important aspect of the question to *you*.

You may find yourself like the man who cried out, “I do believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). If your faith is lacking, is only academic, or is insufficient to cause you to commit your life completely to the Lord, I urge you to read,

study, and obey the Bible—that the Lord may find in you a faith that works by love when He comes! ❖

¹Our world is *mainly* one of Order and Design. While we must deal with “the problem of evil,” the unbeliever has a greater challenge: to explain “the problem of *good*.”

²I realize that there is a “cycle” theory about the universe periodically renewing itself, but at the moment this remains an unsupported theory that goes against known facts of science.

³Time does not allow a thorough discussion of this fascinating line of thought. One of the writers in *The Evidence of God* noted that our understanding that everything had to be made is natural, not learned. Every child asks, “Where did that come from? Who made that?”

⁴I recently saw a television program that showed a device costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. It required much training and experience to operate—a device with one purpose: to pick up and move fragile containers of radioactive materials. In other words, it could perform *one* of the capabilities of the human hand.

⁵The Bible tells us that this world is just a stopping place on the way to eternity; but the fact still remains that *while we are here*, the Bible gives us “the abundant life.”

⁶In many of these countries, the Bible no longer has much influence. However, since the Bible was influential in earlier days, when philosophies of life were formed and national directions were set, the statement remains true.

⁷Think of those who place food and other items in graves for the dead to use in the next life.

THOUGHTS ON FAITH

“Faith is to believe, on the word of God, what we do not see, and its reward is to see and enjoy what we believe.”

Augustine

“Faith is the heart of the mind.”

Anonymous

“All work that is worth anything is done in faith.”

Albert Schweitzer

“It is not faith and works; it is not faith or works; it is faith that works.”

Anonymous

©Copyright, 1999, 2002 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED