

*The Case for Christianity Series:*  
**“THE CASE FOR GOD”**  
 Scripture lesson: Romans 1:18-23

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In Lewis Carroll’s novel, *Alice in Wonderland*, on her adventures, young Alice encounters the Queen of Hearts. The Queen asks Alice how old she is and Alice replies, “I’m seven and a half, exactly.”

“You needn’t say ‘exactly,’” the Queen remarks. “I can believe it without that. Now, I’ll give you something to believe. I’m just one-hundred-and-one, five months and a day.”

“I can’t believe that!” said Alice.

“Can’t you?” the Queen said in a pitying tone. “Try again; draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”

Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said, “one can’t believe impossible things.”

“I daresay, you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes, I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

We can take that statement two ways: The first is to see it as a challenge; to think outside the box; to dream the impossible dream. The other is to take Alice at her word. You can’t believe impossible things. Despite the Queen’s claims, believing impossible things is whimsical at best and delusional at worst. “Just the facts, mam, just the facts,” as Sergeant Friday used to say on the TV drama *Dragnet*.

To many thoughtful and sincere people, asking them to believe in God falls into this second category. It is asking them to believe the impossible. For them the facts, the verification, the proof doesn’t seem to be there. Belief is irrational, unreasonable, maybe even delusional.

The filmmaker and comedian, Woody Allen, says that he would be more prone to believe, “If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name in a Swiss bank.”

We live in a scientific age where for something to be true it must be verifiable. We want proof – verifiable proofs, hard facts. If it can’t be observed, measured, quantified, then it must not be true. And when it comes to God, for some, that kind of evidence isn’t there.

Or, is it? The Bible itself doesn’t argue about the existence of God. Nowhere is there, really, a discussion about the being of God. Instead of talking about whether God is, they talk about what God *does*. They experienced God in and through his interactions with them: delivering them from slavery, providing for them in the wilderness. For them, the existence of God is not a matter of reason, but of experience. They did not think their way to God through some kind of rational proof; God became real to them through God’s own self-revelation in their history.

But, of course, the Bible everywhere assumes the existence of God. This God was known to them through their own history, but he was also known to them through creation.

- “In the beginning God created...,” the book of Genesis says.
- Paul writes in Romans: “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”
- “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” (Ps. 19:1).
- And God was evident to them in the moral order – in the law: Ps19:7 “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”

But believing just because the Bible says so is not reason enough for many. It doesn't prove anything to say, “Because the Bible tells me so.”

Can we say anything to those who want an honest answer? One that is independent of the claims to divine revelation. Is there a way to prove God's existence?

Anthony Flew was an English philosopher who was one of the best known proponents of atheism. He wrote an essay in 1950 outlining why belief in God was irrational and unnecessary. He went on to write books like, *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976), and *Atheistic Humanism* (1993). But in 2004, he shocked philosophers by announcing that God probably did, in fact, exist. He wrote a book entitled, *There Is No God*, with No scratched out. In it, he said that he now believed in a supreme intelligence removed from human affairs that was responsible for the intricate workings of the universe. His discovery, he wrote, was not a pilgrimage of faith, but of reason. It was not dependent upon divine revelation, but based on the evidence that he found in the natural, physical world. He simply followed the evidence where it led him.

He uses a parable to lay out the issues and his approach. Imagine that a satellite phone washes ashore on a remote island inhabited by a tribe that has never had contact with modern civilization. The natives play with the numbers on the dial pad and hear voices. They assume, at first, the device is making the noises. Some of the smarter natives – the scientists of the tribe – assemble an exact replica of the phone and hit the same numbers. They hear the same voices. The conclusion seems obvious to them that this particular combination of metals and chemicals produces what seems like human voices. This means the voices are simply the properties of the device.

But the tribal sage summons the scientists for a discussion. He has thought long and hard about the matter and has reached another conclusion: the voices coming from the device must be coming from people like themselves who are living and conscious even though speaking a different language. Instead of assuming that the voices are the properties of the phone, they should investigate the possibility that they are in touch with other humans. But the scientists laugh at the sage and say, “Look, when we damage the instrument, the voices stop coming, so they are obviously nothing more than sounds produced by a combination of lithium printed on circuit boards and light-emitting diodes.

This parable shows how easy it is to let preconceived theories shape the way we view evidence, instead of letting the evidence shape our theories. He came to the conclusion that many of his fellow atheists were guilty of this. They would argue that we should not ask for any explanation of why the world exists; it's here and that's all. Or, since we cannot believe in the existence of a transcendent source of life, then life must have arisen spontaneously by chance.

For Flew, these are not rational arguments even though they claim to be. They are, in fact, pre-conceived faith claims. And he contends they do not follow the evidence.

So what evidence, outside the Bible and the faith claims it makes, are there for the existence of God?

There is, first of all, the argument from design. If you were to find a watch on the floor and examine it, you would assume that someone dropped it there and that it was made by a watchmaker. And that would be a reasonable assumption. It didn't just appear from nowhere.

Just so, the design apparent in nature, suggests a cosmic designer. Flew argues that there are laws of nature which are regular – mathematically precise. According to Newton's law of motion, an object at rest will remain at rest until acted upon by an external force. This and other laws are precise and always true. The physicist, Stephen Hawkins – himself no theist – agrees that when we look at the universe, the overall impression is one of order. The more that we examine the universe, “the more we find that it is governed by rational laws.”

The only question is how did the universe come packaged in this fashion? Whose laws are they? One non-theist argument is that these laws are our laws and not nature's. They are the way we make sense of the universe – we impose them on nature; that the laws of nature – the laws of physics – do not really exist. Which Flew contends is a refusal to follow the evidence. There are, in fact, mathematical precise equations which tell us how the universe behaves. We did not invent or impose these laws; they exist apart from us.

Physicist and astrobiologist Paul Davies disagrees: “Atheist claims that the laws of nature exist reasonless and the universe is ultimately absurd. As a scientist, I find this hard to accept. There must be an unchanging rational ground in which the logical, orderly nature of the universe is rooted.” (Flew pg. 111) It is at least as reasonable to argue that the design of the universe presuppose a designer as it is to argue the other way. The heavens do seem to declare the glory of God.

Second, there is the argument of a kind of divine cosmic welcome mat. The world seems predisposed to life. So many factors had to come together in a very precise way for life to occur. Scientist Francis Collins puts it this way:

When you look at the universe from the perspective of the scientist, it looks as if it knew we were coming. There are 15 constants – gravity, the strong and weak nuclear forces – that have precise values. If any one of these constants was off, by even one part in a million, the universe could not have actually come to the point where we see it now. Matter would have been unable to coalesce – there would have been no galaxy, stars, planets or people.” (Pg. 134 Keller)

Against the idea that the universe is fine-tuned to welcome life, Richards Dawkins argues that there are probably multiple universes existing over enormous amounts of time and space. Given this, it is inevitable that some of them would be fine-tuned to sustain our kind of life. This universe came into being through pure random accident.

But again, Flew says this doesn't follow the evidence. There is no evidence to support the existence of multiple universes – this is mere speculation, as is the idea that the universe is an accident – a matter of random happenings.

One of the arguments for life arising by random choice is called the “monkey theorem.” If a multitude of monkeys banged away on computer keyboards, they would eventually end up writing a Shakespeare sonnet, goes the argument.

That theory has actually been tested. A computer was placed in a cage of six monkeys. After a month of pounding away on the keys, the monkeys produced 50 pages but not a single word. Not even the single word “A.”

What’s the chance of getting a Shakespeare sonnet? Someone has actually calculated this. If there are 14 lines in each sonnet, and about 458 letters, what’s the likelihood of hammering away and getting 488 letters in sequence to compose a sonnet? What you end up with is 10 to the 690<sup>th</sup> power. You would never get a sonnet by chance.

If you take the entire universe, and put it through the same calculations, the chances of it occurring by random accident are just as unlikely. (Pg. 77 Flew)

It can be argued that life is the result of a random accident. There is at least as much evidence to argue that Paul was right when he said that God “has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”

Thirdly, there is a moral argument for God – the fact that there is a sense of right and wrong in the world, which is universal. There is an “oughtness” to life; a sense of moral obligation. We believe in right and wrong; that there is good and evil. But why do we believe this?

Pastor Timothy Keller writes of a discussion he was having with a young married couple who were having a hard time believing in God. He asked them if there was anything they felt strongly about. The woman spoke up and said she felt strongly about the oppression of women. Keller told her, as a Christian who believes that God made everyone, he agreed. But he was curious why she felt that way. She replied, “Women are human beings, and human beings have rights. It’s wrong to trample on someone’s rights.”

Keller asked her how she knew that. “Everybody knows it’s wrong to violate the rights of others.” He replied that most people in the world *don’t* know that. They don’t have a western view of humanity. “And so, let’s start again. Since you don’t believe in God, why would it be wrong to trample on someone’s rights? Why do you believe in human rights?” And she had to admit, “I don’t know. I just do.”

The philosopher Nietzsche, long ago, argued that if there is no God, then any and all morality of good is baseless. There is no good reason to be kind, loving, good. And this is the problem with many who hold a non-theist view. Often they argue against the existence of God while they go on taking moral judgments for granted. If you are going to say there is no such things as rights, as good, as evil, you have to be able to answer the question, *Sez who?*

To avoid this pitfall, some have argued for an “evolutionary theory” of moral obligation. Altruistic people, who act unselfishly and cooperatively, survived in greater numbers than those who were cruel and selfish, and so passed on their genes. We feel a sense of rightness because it was to our evolutionary advantage to do so.

But for evolutionary purposes, hostility to people outside one’s group or family should be just as right and moral. Just watch *Survivor* on TV if you want a sense of that. If a stranger falls into a river, it certainly would not be to one’s evolutionary advantage to jump in after them. What’s important is that I survive. And yet, most people would feel a sense of guilt for not trying to save someone. How could this trait be a part of natural selection?

If there is no God, then there is no way for anyone to say one action is moral and another immoral. All that can be said – if I like this or I think this – is that it is all relative. All moral

values are subjective. There is no external moral standards outside of ourselves by which our feelings, our preferences, our values can be judged. If God is dead, everything is up for grabs.

Yet, we sense, don't we, that there is such a thing as evil – beating a child to death, starving the poor, murdering innocents. There is such a thing as evil and good – values that exist beyond ourselves – which we discover. Sez who? Christians reply, "God!" Paul writes that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth."

Good is a result of evolutionary selection or the result of intrinsic values which God has instilled into life. Which of these is the more reasonable explanation?

Perhaps, none of these arguments prove the existence of God, but they offer us clues that point us in that direction. It is not as irrational or unreasonable to believe in God as some would have us believe. In fact, according to Anthony Flew and many others, if we follow the evidence, it is as reasonable to believe as it is to disbelieve.

In John Updike's short story, "Pigeon Feathers," young David, on a trip to the outhouse at night, is suddenly confronted with the fact of his own mortality when he stares into the dark hole dug into the ground. Is this what will happen to him? Thrown in a dark hole and that's it? That night, in his bed, David prayed to be reassured.

Though the experiment frightened him, he lifted his hands high into the darkness above his face and begged Christ to touch them. Not hard or long: the faintest, quickest grip would be final for a lifetime. His hands waited in the air, itself a substance, which seemed to move through his fingers; or was it the pressure of his pulse? He returned his hands to beneath the covers uncertain if they had been touched or not. For would not Christ's touch be infinitely gentle?

But young David's hopelessness continued as he tried to build his fortress against death and meaninglessness. One day, his mother sent him out to get rid of the pigeons in the barn. He shot six of them. She told him to bury them or the dog would go wild. He took a shovel and dug a hole in the ground, then, as he picked the dead pigeons up, he studied them. The feathers were wonderfully, intricately made – trimmed to fit a pattern that flowed without error across the bird's body. He lost himself in the geometrical tides of the patterns – designed and executed in a controlled rapture with a joy that hung in the air above and behind him. As he picked up and studied each bird before depositing it in the ground, he was robed in this certainty, that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy his whole creation by refusing to let David live forever.

We can look at the world and say, "Accident." But, we can also look at the world and say, "God."