

Endorsements

“Craig Biehl's, *God the Reason*, is a remarkable work. It presents theology proper--the knowledge of God--in all of its transcendent importance and breadth. It does so in a way that is accessible, clear and spiritually invigorating. If you are thirsting for a deeper and more personal knowledge of the Lord of the universe, drink deeply of this study. The divine perfections celebrated here will bless your life, stir your reason and ground your faith on an unmovable foundation.”

—**Dr. Peter A. Lillback, President, Westminster Theological Seminary**

“This thought-provoking work shows the emptiness of atheism from an angle not often taken. Without indulging in technical terminology or obscure philosophical arguments, Craig Biehl starts with the attributes of God revealed in Scripture, builds a rational worldview upon them, and demonstrates convincingly that without such a God life makes no sense at all.”

—**Dr. Joel R. Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary**

“Craig Biehl's *God the Reason* is a very thorough presuppositional apologetic, arguing God's existence and his necessity for all reasoning, thinking, meaning, and therefore living. The book is a continuous, orderly defense of the biblical worldview. Its arguments are clear and cogent. I hope it gains many readers, Christian and nonChristian alike.”

—**Dr. John M. Frame, J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary**

“It's a wonderful book, a significant contribution to apologetics literature. It is easily clear enough to put in the hands of a layman, but also profound enough to challenge and edify the scholar. I recommend that you get a copy as soon as you can.”

—**Dr. Mark Farnham, Professor and Coordinator of Pastoral and Preseminary Majors, Lancaster Bible College**

“Based on the conviction that Scripture as the self-attesting word of the Triune God is the indispensable foundation of all knowledge, this volume explores in a compelling manner how the truth of the being and primary attributes (or “perfections”) of God is essential for fundamental issues of faith and life. Written for a wide audience, it will be read with considerable profit in our increasingly secularizing times, whether by those who are searching for answers or those seeking greater clarity on the foundations of “what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man” (Westminster Shorter Catechism).”

—**Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia**

GOD

THE REASON

How Infinite Excellence
Gives Unbreakable Faith

CRAIG BIEHL



Carpenter's Son Publishing

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For William Keith Miley
A Faithful Friend and Brother in Christ
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INTRODUCTION

In the Beginning God

“**B**lessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever” (Psalm 146:5-6).¹ “My hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God” (Psalm 62:5-7). Created and adored by a God of infinite excellence, believers walk the “path of life” where “fullness of joy” abides “forevermore” (Psalm 16:11), enjoying in this life a taste of the boundless joy of their heavenly home in God’s presence forever.

The journey of unbelief, however, takes a different path. Attended by a barren hope to a gloomy end, the godless life has been described as part of a tale “told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,” a “brief candle” on “the way to dusty death.”² And while Macbeth spoke from personal anguish and loss, his words continue to haunt anyone willing to think through the implications of a life devoid of eternal significance. In them Shakespeare echoed Solomon’s appraisal of earthly pursuits apart from the consideration of

God: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever” (Ecclesiastes 1:2-4).

The line between insignificance, despair, and eternal death on the one side and significance, joy, and eternal life on the other is drawn for us in the first four words of Scripture, “In the beginning God.” When God stands as the author and explanation of the universe, life becomes worthwhile, a gift to be treasured. When He is cast aside as mythical or unimportant, the words of evil Macbeth ring true and the world recedes into pointless absurdity. Apart from the God of Scripture, all life, meaning, design, beauty, language, knowledge, truth, and morality would be impossible. “In the beginning God,” then, forms the proper starting point for right thinking and living. In the infinite excellence of the Maker and explanation of all things we have the answers to the deepest questions of life.

Scripture unfolds the great works of God from eternity past to eternity future in the new heavens and earth. In our relationship to the Source and explanation of all things we have life, meaning, and purpose, while our trivial existence gains importance as part of God’s eternal purpose. From His love and grace we have eternal life in Christ, in whom we possess all good things and the divine resources to resist the evil forces that would destroy us. Covered in His righteousness we will “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” (Jude 24). From God we have all truth and the ability to know truth; the basis for a proper understanding of God, ourselves, and His universe; and the sure foundation for joy, assurance, and unbreakable faith in the midst of an antagonistic culture of unbelief.³

Since God’s perfections (also known as His attributes) define His nature and inform His works, they provide the ultimate source and guide for knowledge about Him and the universe He created. To properly know ourselves we must know the God who made us. To properly live in the world, we must know Him who owns, orders, and sustains it. To serve Christ and the Gospel in a true and God-honoring way,

we must know the attributes of the God whose Gospel it is.⁴ And because Scripture has ultimate authority as the Word and words of God, it provides the source and ground of a true knowledge of God. Therefore, a proper and God-honoring life and defense of faith in Christ requires a *biblical* approach to authority, truth, and knowledge, one that upholds the authority and independence of God while affirming our dependence on God for all knowledge.⁵

Unbelief is Unreasonable

Scripture tells us the evidence for God’s power, genius, and lordship appears so clear, comprehensive, and compelling that we are “without excuse” for neglecting to worship and give Him thanks (Romans 1:18-22). The food on our dinner table and the rains that produce it give clear witness to God’s existence and goodness (Acts 14:17). Similarly, the divine authority of Scripture stands equally as clear, comprehensive, and compelling in showing the divine excellence of its Author. We bring God’s truth to friends and neighbors who reject the implications of God as their Lord, and not to innocent seekers that lack proof of God’s existence.

And contrary to popular opinion, *unbelief is faith*. The popular picture of “faith versus reason” or “faith versus science” grossly distorts reality to justify unbelief. All people have faith and all people use reason. At issue is whether or not one’s object of faith is true and trustworthy and whether or not people use their God-given reason to honor or dishonor God.⁶

Unbelief cannot speak with authority about the ultimate nature of God and His universe. For instance, an atheist would need to know everything about the universe *and beyond* to know that God does not exist. Can we really speak with authority about an infinite God apart from Scripture when we can’t remember where we put the car keys?

At the same time, unbelief gives impossible reasons for the universe. Without God, all is reduced to meaningless random chance

occurrences adrift in a sea of random chance occurrences. Apart from God as the ground of reality, knowledge and “truth” are meaningless. Of course, unbelievers use reason, do science, and discover truth, but only because God exists and they are not the products of random chance.

Moreover, answer 2+2 without 4 or explain the origin of beautiful paintings without painters and you’ll begin to appreciate the problems created by philosophers ignoring God as the creator and sustainer of all things. As we will see, life becomes a strange puzzle without the One who gives it meaning. We create needless mysteries when we deny the only possible explanation of life.

Yet, we often miss the great implications of God as the source of knowledge and truth. Unbiblical answers to difficult theological questions have weakened Christian truth and our ability to defend it. For instance, some try to solve the “problem of evil” by making God weak or the author of evil, contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture.⁷ Some deny God’s infinite power by making biblical miracles compatible with anti-supernatural beliefs. But God transcends the laws He made and upholds. The Red Sea did not need to be shallow for Israel to cross it. History abounds with efforts to make Christianity acceptable to unbelief by denying that God is greater than the universe He created and upholds, undermining Scripture as trustworthy.

In contrast, a proper theology and defense of Christianity will honor the authority and supremacy of God as the creator and sustainer of all things, and accept our need of Him for existence, knowledge, and truth. We dare not follow Adam by assuming our own authority. We honor God by giving Him first place in all things, including how we think and defend the Christian faith.

Knowledge Requires Humility when Approaching Unbelief

Christians need not turn to irrational mysticism to respond to unbelief; neither should we exalt ourselves by our knowledge. Defending and declaring Christ involves more than persuasive arguments. Next to the testimony of Scripture, the best evidence for the truth of the Gospel entails the life of Christ displayed in His people. Yet, despite the obvious importance of this basic truth, we sometimes forget or ignore it. Imagine, for a moment, trying to bring an unbeliever to Christ by banging on a metal garbage can lid. (For you younger folks, they were metal in the old days.) It sounds silly, but God warns us we are in danger of doing exactly that.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

A “nothing” making noise is not an effective way to defend the faith and reach people for Christ. If you have lived long enough you may have generated some noise of your own; I cringe at the thought of some of my unhelpful displays over the years. Truth should be adorned with love. As Francis Schaeffer once said, “There is nothing more ugly than a Christian orthodoxy without understanding or without compassion.”⁸

At the same time, a kind of “love” or zeal without truth is equally harmful and ineffective. God is the source of all truth and knowledge and defending and sharing Christ requires speaking the truth He gave us. No one comes to Christ apart from the Spirit of God working through the Word of God, regardless of the brilliance of the arguments. New life requires the infinite power of God and truth. Indeed, we are born again “through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). So, even if unbelievers accuse us of

being unloving when we tell them the truth, we cannot love them properly without doing so, even if they hate us for it.

The Benefits of This Study

When we see how God's perfections relate to every aspect of our life and thinking, the seemingly unrelated aspects of the world become part of a marvelous picture of God's purpose and works. All things, including creation, redemption, and all biblical truths will be seen as part of God's ultimate purpose to display His infinite excellence. Science, philosophy, and ethics will be rightly viewed as interdependent and determined by God. Moreover, believers will grow in strength, wisdom, and grace in sharing the truth and refuting the attacks of unbelief. Our faith and assurance will be encouraged and strengthened as we become immune to intimidating arguments, grow in our ability to think in a God-honoring way, and increase in our knowledge and love of the excellence of God in all things.

Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

As the perfections of God are most perfectly and clearly displayed in Christ, we can say with Paul:

Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:7-8)

What can be more practical than to know and love the One who created and saved us, who to know is life and joy forever? As our bodies and the world around us corrupt and decay, He carries us by His love to a joyful eternity where all will be right and glorious. Nothing can be more practical and relevant than to know, love, and be loved by the One who makes all things “work together for our good” (Romans 8:28). Apart from God, we are no more than a bit part in a tragic tale of futility, death, and “sound and fury, signifying nothing.” But with God, we are part of something great and glorious, something that gives our life profound meaning and purpose, something infinitely excellent and eternal. A joyful, meaningful, and fruitful life in Christ depends on knowing the nature and implications of God’s perfections.

In introducing his classic work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer quotes a portion of a sermon preached by C. H. Spurgeon in 1855, whose counsel remains as relevant today as ever. Spurgeon’s words provide a fitting start to our discussion of the perfections of God.

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. . . . It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, “Behold I am wise.” But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass’s colt; and with solemn exclamation, “I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.” No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. . . .

But while the subject *humbles* the mind, it also *expands* it. He who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. . . . The most excellent study for expanding

the soul is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently *consolatory*. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.⁹

Amen. To a “devout musing” on the perfections of God, I invite you into the pages of this book. Our approach will involve defining a perfection of God and examining its implications for right thinking, living, unbreakable faith, and defending and sharing the Gospel of Christ.

Endnotes

- ¹ Unless noted otherwise, Bible quotes will be taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Crossway, 2001).
- ² William Shakespeare, *Macbeth. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/macbeth.5.5.html>, Act 5, Scene 5.
- ³ The theological discipline of defending the Christian faith against the attacks of unbelief is called apologetics. The terms apologist and apologetics are from the Greek term *apologia*, meaning to make a defense or reply to an accusation or judgment. See Walter Bauer, “apologia,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed., trans. and ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 96. The term is often translated defense, as in Acts 22:1: “Hear the *defense* I now make,” or 1 Corinthians 9:3: “My *defense* to those who examine me is this.” See also Acts 25:16 and 2 Timothy 4:16. Perhaps the most important verse of the New Testament concerning apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer [defense] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” From this short verse we might define apologetics as follows: *The defense and proclamation of the gospel and all of God’s revealed truth in a gentle and reverent method and manner that properly honors Christ as Lord of all.* A more comprehensive definition of apologetics might include the study of God’s attributes and activity as the only basis of a true and God-honoring comprehensive biblical worldview, including the study of and response to the irrational assumptions of all systems of unbelief; the study of the rational and defensible assumptions of Christian faith, assurance of the authority, accuracy, and trustworthiness of Scripture, and the presentation of the glory of God and Christ in the Gospel. While apologetics does address important philosophical issues, it is primarily a biblical and theological discipline, touching all aspects of theology. Regardless, as God is the source and basis of all reasoning, philosophy and apologetics are ultimately aspects of theology.
- ⁴ The defense of the Christian faith has taken many forms throughout the history of the church. Some apologists have looked to Western philosophical thought and principles as providing the basis of knowledge, truth, and a rational defense of Christianity. As a result, apologetics is sometimes treated as a separate discipline from theology, or as the discipline that establishes the ground and validity of theology. For a brief discussion of this point, see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 43-87.
- ⁵ The “presuppositional” apologetic approach presented here is largely based on the apologetic method of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til’s apologetic is sometimes called “covenantal” apologetics, distinguishing it from other

apologetic methods more broadly defined as “presuppositional” or “Reformed.” See K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

- ⁶ What unbelievers typically mean by faith in their “faith versus reason” dichotomy is blind, unjustified faith, a leap in the dark despite a lack of evidence or evidence to the contrary. This “faith” is then set in opposition to their own “scientific” and justified reason. As we will see, the opposite is actually true.
- ⁷ To be addressed later.
- ⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* in *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990; Originally published by IVP, 1968), 34.
- ⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Immutability of God,” *The New Park Street Pulpit*, located in *The Spurgeon Archive*, accessed August 25, 2014; <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0001.htm>. Quoted in J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), 13-14.

CHAPTER ONE

God Is Eternal

God has no beginning. He has always existed and will always exist. Never has there been a time when God did not exist and never will there be a time when God will not exist. He has no cause, beginning, or end. As infinite, perfect, and unchanging, God exists eternally.

And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14)

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)

The LORD abides forever. (Psalm 9:7)

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality. (1 Timothy 6:15-16)

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.' (Revelation 1:8)

Implications for Living and Defending the Faith

God Created and Sustains Everything

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and from nothing came everything by the word of His power. (Whether or not the appearance of the universe made a big noise or bang, Scripture does not tell us.) Prior to creation, nothing existed but God—no heavens, earth, time, space, matter, energy, angels or people—nothing but God as infinite spirit, without beginning or end, forever. Created by God, everything continues to exist by the ongoing exertion of His power.¹

God’s letter to mankind opens with this most basic and important fact, giving us the explanation of reality, the answer to life’s important questions, and the ground for right thinking about all things. “In the beginning God” tells us the nature of God, mankind, and His world are determined by God alone. “In the beginning God” gives us the source and foundation of *all* authority, truth, and knowledge. “In the beginning God” provides the ground for how we should live in His universe, in *every* realm of our existence.² Schaeffer writes:

True spirituality covers all of reality. There are things the Bible tells us as absolutes which are sinful—which do not conform to the character of God. But aside from these the Lordship of Christ covers *all* of life and *all* of life equally. It is not only that true spirituality covers all of life, but it covers all parts of the spectrum of life equally. In this sense there is nothing concerning reality that is not spiritual.³

A right understanding of *all* things, then, requires a right understanding of God, and that which defines the nature of God is His perfections. Therefore, knowledge of God’s perfections forms the basis of right thinking about everything. The big questions about

God can only be answered by God, and the big questions about life and the world can only be answered by the One who designed, created, and sustains them. Thus, our struggles to live a faithful Christian life can ultimately be traced to an improper understanding of the person and works of God. “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2).

The Universe Depends on God for Everything

Nothing could exist if God did not create, order, and sustain it

Before God created you, the angels, and the heavens and earth, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit existed forever in perfect joy and fellowship, in need of nothing. Everything else, including all time, matter, space, and energy, had their beginning when God spoke them into existence. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. ‘Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures,’” and so they swim, and “let us make man in our image,” and here we are.

The universe, then, has a beginning and is not eternal. “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). God spoke and brought all things into being and upholds them by the “word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). Speaking of God the Son, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served

by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth; having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. (Acts 17:24-26)

Someday, God will create “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth” will “pass away” (Revelation 21:1). They, also, will exist by God creating and sustaining them by His ongoing power. God designed, created, and orders all things for His purpose, working “all things after the counsel of His will” to bring about the praise of His glory in the salvation of His people (Ephesians 1:11-12). Indeed, “according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13), where we will dwell with God forever, “blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (Jude 24).

God created and upholds all “natural” laws.

As God designed, created, and sustains all things of the universe, so He orders and sustains all “natural” or physical laws by which He orders and governs the universe. In fact, *we do better calling “natural” laws “divine” laws*, for apart from God’s ongoing ordering of the smallest measure of matter and energy, no such laws would exist. Such laws are not really laws at all if by laws we mean they exist and operate apart from God’s ongoing power. The uniformity or laws of nature are no more than how God orders the various aspects of the universe in a particular manner for a particular time.

On a recent flight to Dallas I was privileged to sit beside a physics professor from a prestigious Ivy League university, a cordial and refined gentleman with gray hair to match his gracious manners and impressive credentials. He was a quark expert, specializing in the sub-atomic building blocks of the material universe, and he did not believe in God. Our cramped seats became a classroom in the sky as the inquisitive student listened to the scholarly professor explain

the world. His answers were thoughtful and detailed, with helpful charts, diagrams, and formulas composed on several pieces of paper.

Throughout our conversation, having asked him every question I could muster about the nature of atoms and quarks, he said nothing that contradicted the biblical account of reality. From his perspective, however, nothing he said gave the least evidence for the existence of God, even while everything he described presented a marvelous picture of the necessity and genius of God to arrange and uphold all things (why this is the case will be examined later). At one point the professor noted that if you remove all of the empty space from a 1,000 x 1,000 x 1,000 meter cube of water, the amount of matter remaining would only fill a cubic centimeter. I recently viewed a lecture where a physicist noted that even that could be compressed into virtually nothing, leaving nothing but space! (I cannot vouch for the accuracy of any of this; I am merely quoting some experts.)

Toward the end of the flight I asked my teacher why everything held together in such an organized, uniform, and consistent pattern when things are mostly space with electrical charges “bouncing around.” He noted that scientists can measure and predict things, and observe that things do hold together in particular ways, but ultimately do not know why. He basically said the same thing about gravity.⁴

Of course, Scripture tells us why. Apart from God, nothing would exist, let alone hold together in the amazing order and complexity that animates our universe. What we see and discover in science reflects how God currently orders and sustains the matter and energy He created. What we call a miracle is merely God doing something different than what we normally see Him do as He orders and sustains things. God alone, therefore, determines what is possible and impossible in the universe, *not those who observe and discover* how God orders and sustains it. Miracles will be addressed in detail in the discussion of God’s boundless power in chapter fourteen.

Moreover, uniform and universal laws, including laws of logic, are inexplicable apart from God creating, ordering, and upholding them. Apart from God, no plausible explanation for the fixed and

predictable operations of the universe is possible. I'll never forget the answer of one internet pundit when asked to give an account for the ordered and uniform laws of logic. Without hesitation, he declared, "They just are." But *why* "they just are" was the question, which he was unable to answer. If people deny God is behind all things, they are left with random chance as the explanation of a universe of ordered and uniform laws, when random chance cannot produce or sustain uniform and universal laws. Issues related to random chance, logic, and the necessity of God's existence will be discussed further in the next two chapters.

Thus, the fact that the universe depends on God for everything forms the foundation to right thinking and a God-honoring view of the world. Yet, Christians do not always appreciate the importance of this point. We are so accustomed to God's consistent governing of the universe that we sometimes take His work of ordering and sustaining it for granted, as if the physical laws of the universe operate independently of God. After all, everything appears to work the way it did yesterday, last year, or a thousand years ago. We fully expect to wake up in the morning as the same person and drive the same car to work that we parked in the same driveway the night before.

We study the universe and develop accurate explanations of how it all operates, including the stars in the sky, our own physical bodies, and the smallest building blocks of matter. We have used that knowledge to achieve great things for the benefit (and destruction) of mankind. Yet, we can sometimes forget that all these things operate by the *ongoing power* of God. If God were to stop exerting His power to sustain the universe for even a moment, all things would cease to exist.

And while we are careful of our tendency to stray from the path of the Chief Shepherd in issues of piety and obedience, we sometimes miss the fact that piety and obedience also involve how we think about God and His world. We are often mindful of spiritual opposition to our faith in Christ and the necessity to "put on the full armor of God" in order to "stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11), but we sometimes forget that the devil's schemes

involve promoting wrong thoughts about God and His world. And promote he does—we are confronted with his misinformation on a daily basis. Satan’s lies form much of the fabric of our post-Christian culture. And since our sin displays a practical atheism that exalts our will over God’s will, so we also exhibit a practical kind of Deism by viewing the universe as begun by God but operating according to independent physical laws. In this we unwittingly echo the lie that God does not order and uphold all things. We need to take care that we do not affirm the desire of unbelievers to define the universe and their own lives as existing and operating apart from God.

As Christians we acknowledge and study physical laws, but we understand them as the display of how God orders and sustains the universe and not the product of random chance. We rejoice that God orders the world in such a way that both believers and unbelievers can make great scientific discoveries. We thank God that when viewed rightly, all scientific discoveries reinforce our faith in Christ. As we will see further below, the existence and pursuit of scientific discovery give clear testimony to God’s power and presence and never diminish true faith.

We Depend on God for Everything

We depend on God for life

When we think of our dependence on God, we usually think of our dependence for physical life and our daily bread.

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16)

God not only created the human race by creating Adam, He formed each one of us in the womb and ordained the very days of our lives. The hairs of our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30), while the food on the supermarket shelf and dinner table clearly display God's goodness and care for His creatures (Acts 14:17). And as Paul preached at Mars Hill, even some unbelievers acknowledge their dependence on God for life, for "in Him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are His offspring'" (Acts 17:28). Yet, life is more than physical life and daily bread, for "man shall not live on bread alone" (Matthew 4:4).

We depend on God for truth, knowledge, and authority

A bit less familiar and understood than our dependence on God for physical and spiritual life is our dependence on God for all truth, knowledge, and authority. We live by "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). In the same way we sometimes overlook God's ongoing ordering and sustaining of the universe, so we often discount the importance of our *dependence* on God for what we know.

To begin, since God created, orders, sustains, and rules over all things, He sits as the ultimate authority and source of all truth. No higher authority or standard of truth exists in the universe. All things have their beginning and ongoing existence by God's power, so God alone knows completely and comprehensively why and how all things exist and work together. God alone views and understands all things from an objective vantage point, for He remains distinct from the universe He created and upholds. The writer who produces and directs a play knows best the nature, relationship, purpose, and meaning of all aspects of the play, while individual actors with small bit parts may know very little of such things. Although we sometimes cannot see the forest for the trees, God knows perfectly the forest *and* the trees. God's explanation is always true.

Next, apart from God giving us the ability to know and understand Him and His universe, we could know nothing. He created

us in His image, in personal relationship with Him, with the ability to rightly know Him and the world He created. God was able to speak directly to Adam and Eve in the garden because He created them with the ability to know and understand Him through His personal presence and spoken, intelligible language.

Moreover, our dependence on God speaking to us through language preceded our fall into sin. We know that sinners require God's special revelation in spoken and written language to understand Him and His world correctly. Apart from His special revelation in language, we would never view Him or His world correctly. As Adam avoided God in the garden following his sin, so all fallen and unredeemed people avoid God and suppress the clear, comprehensive, and compelling knowledge of God (Romans 1:18-22). Yet, even prior to Adam's sin, both Adam and Eve needed God to speak to them in language in order to relate to God and know His will for them. The command to cultivate the garden was given in language, as was the all-important command to not eat the forbidden fruit. Thus, God's special revelation in language (now given to us in Scripture) is necessary for us as created beings and dependent on God for all things.

Accordingly, we depend on God for the content of truth and knowledge. We can observe the world and speculate about the ultimate nature of God and the universe, but the effects of our fall into sin have made our interpretations untrustworthy. Indeed, "He who trusts in his own mind is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). We are like someone on a diet who knows a thousand reasons why a detour into the ice cream shop constitutes a moral necessity. "Dairy products are part of a balanced and healthy diet—so what if they happen to taste good." The more adept can easily enlist Scripture: "'All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a *continual feast*,' (emphasis mine) and what feast does not include ice cream?" Or, "A joyful heart is good medicine,"⁵ so what could be better medicine than to happily devour a banana split? Did I mention the nutritional value of a banana?" In the same way (and all kidding aside), we lack the neutral objectivity to interpret God

and the world without the bias of our personal preferences driving our interpretations. Apart from God's explanation of Himself and His world, we would interpret all things to suit our own desires.⁶ "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Happily for us, God knows our heart (Jeremiah 17:10) and has given us His Word as a "lamp" to our feet and a "light" to our "path" (Psalm 119:105). "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Additionally, we lack the ability to interpret the ultimate nature of God and His world correctly apart from God's explanation. We are constrained by time, space, and our limited abilities, as well as three or so dimensions, five senses, and plus or minus seventy years on this earth. How can people so limited make true statements about the ultimate nature of God and reality apart from God's explanation?⁷ The universe is a big place and some of us have never been out of our hometown or country, let alone to the end of the universe and beyond. Since God transcends the universe He created, we could not describe or know Him accurately without His revelation. God's admonition to Job is instructive:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:2-7)

Created, dependent, and finite people are unable to make true and authoritative statements about the ultimate nature of God and the universe apart from God's revelation.

It follows, then, that truth is what God says it is, or that which corresponds to God's explanation of Himself and His universe.

Our knowledge is *derived* from God and not original to ourselves. We observe and interpret reality, and insofar as our interpretations are correct, they are nonetheless interpretations that depend upon God as the source of all truth, both as the giver of our ability to see and know truth, and as the ultimate authority and standard of truth. We may discover truth when we engage in science, but God remains, after all, the creator of it.

Therefore, God has given us the ability to know truth as He desires us to know it. Created in God's image, we can know truth insofar as it accurately reflects and agrees with His revelation. At the same time, our knowledge differs from God's in that our knowledge is dependent on or derived from God's knowledge and subject to human limitations. In contrast, God's knowledge is independent, original, eternal, and infinite. As we differ from God as finite and created by God, so our knowledge differs from God's knowledge in its quality and quantity⁸ (to be discussed further in chapter eight).

We depend on God for purpose, meaning, and a moral compass

As God created us and is the source and standard of all knowledge and truth, so He determines our ultimate purpose, meaning, and the moral standards by which we should live. God owns us and determined our purpose when He made us. He alone determines right and wrong. All these prerogatives rightfully belong to God as the creator and owner of all things. Of course, the "prince of the power of the air," that fallen angel and tempter of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, would have us believe otherwise. Yet, even Satan, though he perverts what knowledge he has, can know nothing apart from God's revelation.

Conversely, no ultimate purpose, meaning, or moral compass exists apart from God. Of course, atheists and other unbelievers have moral standards and non-Christian civilizations often have elaborate and mutually-agreed-upon "social contracts" by which to live. However, these standards do not exist because we evolved as random chance occurrences in a world of random chance occurrences,

but because God has given all people a conscience by writing His law on every heart.

Civilizations do not exist in a vacuum and ultimately come from a single source. From Scripture we know that all people descended from Adam, Eve and later Noah and his family, with God's revealed truth passed from generation to generation in one form or another. No atheist lives unaffected by the influences of parents, peers, schools, culture, etc., all of which may have been influenced by and reflect Judeo-Christian values. Unbelievers may deny God's law as the source of their morality, but they borrow from it to live ordered and moral lives, nonetheless.⁹

Moreover, apart from acknowledging God as the source, standard, and ultimate judge of right and wrong, morality reduces to relativism with no ultimate right or wrong, with human opinion elevated to the highest moral authority. Random chance occurrences are free to do as they please. Thus, atheists and agnostics may have well-developed moral principles by which they live, but only because they do not fully live according to the implications of their atheism and agnosticism.¹⁰

We can thank God that evolutionists do not generally live according to the tenets of their theory. Of the many causes of the Nazi reign of terror we can identify, the application of the evolutionary principle of the survival of the fittest would be near the top of the list. Reflecting his hatred of Christian morality and his exaltation of power, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche represents a more consistent application of atheistic and evolutionary principles than many other philosophical views. In reading Nietzsche, one can easily see the soil in which the evils of eugenics, Aryanism, and the Holocaust took root. In *The Anti-Christ*, he wrote, "Good" is "everything that enhances people's feeling of power, will to power, power itself," while the "bad" is "everything stemming from weakness." "Happiness" is "the feeling that power is *growing*, that some resistance has been overcome. *Not* contentedness, but more power; *not* peace, but war; *not* virtue, but prowess....The weak and failures should perish: first principle of *our* love of humanity. And they should be helped

to do this. What is more harmful than any vice?—Active pity for all failures and weakness—Christianity.”¹¹ “The Christian idea of God—God as a god of the sick...is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God the world has ever seen.”¹²

For many, the words of Nietzsche are shocking. Yet, they reflect an evolutionary worldview. On the one hand, Nietzsche correctly characterized God as a God of “failures,” “weakness,” and the “sick.” On the other hand, his evolutionary worldview did not provide for him a proper response. For this he will give an account to the “God of the weak.”

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” And the King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:31-40)

In contrast to the philosophy of Nietzsche, many were driven by love of this “God of the weak” to give refuge to the targets of Nazi terror, risking their own suffering and death in concentration camps for the sake of the powerless and persecuted. They lived and died by the higher standard and greater purpose of loving Christ

and the weak. The contrast between the ways of God and the philosophy of Nietzsche and its consequences is stark.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

During World War II, God's "weak" included Casper and Cornelia ten Boom and their children. While the Nazis occupied the Netherlands, they risked their own lives to save the lives of hundreds of Jews, including the use of their home as a hiding place.¹³ From a love of Christ they took to heart God's admonition:

Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (Proverbs 24:11-12)

One of Casper ten Boom's daughters, Corrie, tells the story of her encounter with a pensive and troubled Nazi interrogator, Lieutenant Rahms, whom she met during her initial imprisonment for protecting Jews. The lieutenant showed Corrie kindness in his initial visit, though Corrie rightly suspected he was manipulating her to gain information about others involved in protecting Jews. In the course of the conversation, Corrie spoke to the lieutenant about her ministry of preaching to the "feeble-minded" in what she called her "church for mentally retarded people." Lieutenant Rahms responded in typical Nazi fashion, "If you want converts, surely one normal person is worth all the half-wits in the world!" Corrie nervously replied, "The truth, Sir...is that God's viewpoint

is sometimes different from ours—so different that we could not even guess at it unless He had given us a Book which tells us such things.” Corrie “knew it was madness to talk this way to a Nazi officer,” but she continued. “In the Bible I learn that God values us not for our strength or our brains but simply because He has made us. Who knows, in His eyes a half-wit may be worth more than a watchmaker. Or—a lieutenant.”¹⁴

In a later encounter, Corrie spoke to the lieutenant about the message of God’s Book. “It says...that a Light has come into this world, so that we need no longer walk in the dark. Is there darkness in your life, Lieutenant?” After a long silence, and in a surprising moment of candor, the officer admitted, “There is great darkness.... I cannot bear the work I do here.”¹⁵

I do not know the fate of Lieutenant Rahms. We can hope that his earthly darkness drove him to flee from eternal darkness and embrace the Light of the World. Maybe we will see him in heaven. Or, sadly, like Pontius Pilate, maybe he traded justice and reverence for God for his short-term power and livelihood and became an eternal tragedy.

Many participants in the Nazi reign of terror likely struggled with the evils with which Lieutenant Rahms struggled. Many made eye contact with the precious people who were dehumanized as apes by a worldview that saw Aryans as the apex of evolutionary progress. Most could not distinguish Jewish children from their own. Many saw the disproportionate accomplishments of Jews in society, contrary to the assertions of the propagandists. Yet they participated in the murder.

What lives might have been spared the terror of the racist Aryanism if people were rightly treated as endowed with dignity, as created in the image of God. What concentration camps would never have been built and what trains would never have carried their priceless cargo if people acknowledged dependence on God for purpose, meaning, and a moral compass. What horrors might have been prevented if Nietzsche had bowed the knee to the “God of the weak” and had never penned his deadly philosophy. The Nazi

god, the Aryan pinnacle of human evolution, was no god, with no ultimate standard of right and wrong, no ultimate accountability, and no ultimate consequences for evil behavior. As William Penn once said, “If we are not governed by God, then we will be ruled by tyrants.”¹⁶

Many were partners in the evils of the Holocaust, so beware—if you reject and ignore God’s moral compass, someone else will provide one for you. As C. S. Lewis observed, “When all that says ‘it is good’ has been debunked, what says ‘I want’ remains.” Then what “I want” will be conditioned by the propagandists who promote their cause, “motivated simply by their own pleasure.”¹⁷ If we lack a moral anchor beyond personal preference and the culture that surrounds us, we will become a mere pawn in the tyranny of someone else’s pursuit of power and pleasure—the prevailing winds will drive us where we never dreamed we would go.

We Owe God Everything

God needs nothing, is perfect apart from His creation, and did not need to create anyone or anything

God needs nothing and owes nothing to anyone or anything, for by Him all things were created, and on Him all things depend for everything. God exists and has always existed in perfect happiness. Nothing could be added to God to increase His happiness, since nothing could be added to improve perfection. Yet, the fact that God created people to be in a loving relationship with Him raises the question, why did He create us? Why would God create anything if He needs nothing? Moreover, creation and redemption as the means by which the Father blesses the Son with the gift of a bride (the church as the bride of Christ) appears similar to God creating Eve for Adam because “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Could it be that God created us because it is not good for God to be alone? An interesting question, but unlike

Adam, God has never been alone. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist eternally in a perfect fellowship of love. As perfect, God has no needs.

In speaking of the pleasure God has in creating people and communicating to them His holiness and happiness, Edwards writes, “Tis no argument of the emptiness or deficiency of a fountain that it is inclined to overflow.” In other words, the fact that God created us does not argue that we met a need or deficiency in Him. Rather, He created us from the overflow of His perfect goodness and self-sufficiency.¹⁸

As God needs and lacks nothing, He depends on us for nothing and owes us nothing. In creating mankind and the universe, He remains free and able to do as He pleases with what He created and owns. Like a potter enjoys the right to mold the clay as he desires (Romans 9:20-21), so God does all things “according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

In stark contrast, we owe God everything always. We have nothing we did not receive and can receive nothing unless God provides it.¹⁹ Created by God, we are obligated (and privileged) to love, honor, and worship Him forever. Moreover, the highest esteem and reverence necessarily belong to a God of infinite excellence. We bear the responsibility and obligation appropriate to the greatness of God and our relationship to Him.

Therefore, the minimum that created people owe to God is perfect love and obedience.²⁰ We can merit nothing from God, while all good things we receive from God are undeserved gifts. And even if Adam would have obeyed in the garden, he would have been given eternal life by the gracious arrangement of God alone, which God was under no obligation to initiate and bestow.²¹

Our debt to God, then, puts our complaints into proper perspective. Given our rebellion against God, our every breath comes by the mercy of God not giving us what we deserve, and our every blessing comes by the grace of God giving us what we do not deserve. And while mysteries remain, we have a proper starting point to engage difficult questions: God owes us nothing while we owe

God perfect love, honor, and obedience. Thus, more appropriate than asking why bad things happen to good people is asking why such good things happen to those who willfully disregard their obligation to love, honor, and obey their excellent and gracious Creator. *Why does God love those who shout for His death while He offers them eternal life?* When our every sin cries, “Crucify!” and our indifference cries, “Barabbas!” why should anything good happen to us?

All God’s Works Display His Divine Excellence

Everything God created displays God’s divine excellence

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). “The whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3).

For 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 honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18-21)

The evidence for God’s existence, genius, and power is so obvious that no one has an excuse for not giving God honor and thanks. As the works of a Rembrandt or Michelangelo surpass the scribbling of a child and display their maker’s brilliance, so the works of God display His divine genius. The evidence appears so convincing that Scripture tells us that unbelievers “know” God, even while they suppress that knowledge from a heart of hostility toward God.²² Unbelievers lack the intimate and loving aspect of the

believer's knowledge and seek to destroy true knowledge of God in the world. Believers rejoice in knowing God and seek that others should also know Him. And as the evidence of God surrounds the unbeliever at every turn, suppression of the truth is a full-time job. The theory of evolution begins and endures by this denial of the obvious, contrary to the clear testimony of created reality.

Further, God “did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Every grain of wheat, every bite from an apple or candy bar gives clear witness to our debt to God. Every raindrop declares His goodness. Believer or unbeliever, every good thing we enjoy in life gives reason to thank and worship God.

The knowledge of God extends beyond our surroundings into the depths of our soul, for He has written His law upon every heart.²³ All people have a sense of God's existence, an inescapable knowledge of God within their conscience and consciousness. Many will go to great lengths to deny this, yet the most hardened atheist cannot escape it. The madness of those who hold in contempt the One who holds their eternal destiny is magnified by the fact that, deep down, they know better. However people may attempt to suppress the knowledge of God, “a sense of Deity is indelibly engraven [sic] on the human heart.”²⁴

Even the most zealous advocates of the theory of evolution, with its principle of natural selection or survival of the fittest, have morals that cannot be reconciled with their explanation of life. Atheists go to great lengths to claim an ethical code of living, even while their worldview denies an ultimate reason for one. Macroevolution gives no basis for morality: If a lion is hungry he eats, even if it happens to be you. He does so with no concern for your family, the preservation of society, or any other higher principles. He just eats and takes a nap. If your family shows up to argue natural rights, they'll make a nice meal, too. No qualms. Evolution does not make us better than a hungry lion—a God-given conscience does. And by the way, among hungry beasts, higher principles like

self-sacrifice do not move one up the food chain; principled beasts become tasty meals or starve.

Moreover, why should atheists feel compelled to justify their unbelief by pointing to a moral code? Why should their morality validate a view that cannot account for ultimate standards beyond personal preference? And why would they feel the need to justify the legitimacy of their unbelief by measuring up to a standard that cannot be reconciled with or be produced by random chance and natural selection? They do so because God has written His law upon every heart.²⁵

The believer, however, rejoices in the display of God's power and genius in His ordering of all things. The faith of the high school physics student blossoms by every ordered equation and theorem. The gardener's comfort in God's promises grows by sight of the flowers and trees, and even by the lowly and pernicious weed, itself more sophisticated than the most advanced invention of mankind. The sun, soil, and breeze all add to the grand exhibition of God's handiwork. No one, regardless of circumstances, lacks evidence. Imagine the aid to our attitude when we rightly see the power and genius of God displayed in all things. Imagine the help to our hope and joy when all things give us reason to be thankful. Imagine the consolation to our soul when we understand that we are never without the clear testimony to God's goodness and presence.

Special revelation (Scripture) displays God's divine excellence

When we speak of God's special as compared to His general revelation, we refer to God's specific acts and communications to people within history at specific times, as compared to His general acts of revelation in creation, conscience, and ongoing provision of good things. Most particularly, special revelation refers to Scripture, itself special revelation and the written account of God's acts of special revelation. Just as God's creating and sustaining activity bear the distinct marks of their divine Author, so Scripture, the very word and words of God, bears the clear, comprehensive, and

compelling marks of its divine Author. In speaking of Scripture and the Gospel, Edwards writes:

The divine glory and beauty of divine things is in itself a real evidence of their divinity, and the most direct and strong evidence...We cannot rationally doubt but that things that are divine, and that appertain to the Supreme Being, are vastly different from the things that are human: that there is a God-like, high, and glorious excellency in them, that does so distinguish them from the things which are of men that the difference is ineffable; and therefore such as, if seen will have a most convincing, satisfying influence upon any one that they are what they are, viz., divine.²⁶

That people reject the authority of Scripture, as they reject the testimony of creation, providence, and their own conscience displays an issue of the heart, not evidence. As Christ said, “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17). The heart unwilling to do the will of God will not see Scripture as the divine revelation of God’s will.

Moreover, the heart that remains unconvinced of its own sin will not see Scripture in its proper glory. James Denney made this excellent point:

To say that Paul is unintelligible, or that he presents Christianity in a way which does it every kind of injustice and is finally unacceptable to us, is to fly in the face of history and experience. There have always been people who found Paul intelligible and accepted the gospel as he preached it. There are such people still, if not in theological class rooms, then in mission halls, at street corners, in lonely rooms. It is not historical scholarship that is wanted for the understanding of him, and neither is it the insight of genius: it is despair. Paul did not preach for scholars, nor even for philosophers; he preached for sinners. He had no gospel except for men whose mouths were stopped, and who were standing condemned at the bar of God. They understood

him, and they find him eminently intelligible still. When a man has the simplicity to say, with Dr. Chalmers, “What could I do if God did not justify the ungodly?” he has the key to the Pauline gospel of reconciliation in his hand.²⁷

He also has the key to the glory of God and the Gospel as revealed from the first to the last page of Scripture.

The purpose of all things is the display of God’s divine excellence

All of God’s works display the beauty of His excellence as part of His ultimate purpose in all things. The universe forms the setting for the accomplishment of God’s ultimate purpose to display His excellence in and through the person and redeeming work of Jesus Christ. He is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3). Christ, God the Son, is the highest and supreme display of God’s excellence, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9). Christ displays the infinite excellence of God in His condescending to an infinite degree to take on Himself a human body and nature, and in suffering infinite wrath for the infinitely unworthy. The perfections of God were never so clearly displayed than in the obedience of Christ to death on the cross at Calvary. In Christ redeeming sinners we see the divine excellence of God’s perfect justice, holiness, love, mercy, grace, wisdom, power, and knowledge, et al. “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:4b-6).

The world is the stage on which the ultimate display of God’s excellence in the person and redemptive work of Christ takes place. The Gospel events are accomplished, in part, through created things, while the calling of the elect takes place in time in the created realm. All things are for the ultimate purpose to display God’s infinite excellence in and through the person and redeeming work of Christ.²⁸

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

Unbelief Denies the Obvious

Man is willful in unbelief and without excuse

For good reason God tells us, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”” (Psalm 14:1, 53:1). Apart from the terrible eternal consequences of unbelief, the clear, comprehensive, and compelling nature of the evidence renders all unbelief blameworthy and foolish. I can remember one particular encounter with an unbelieving friend in a beautiful backyard garden, complete with flowers, trees, sunshine, and food on the grill. As we spoke, using the mind and reasoning God gave us, breathing the air God created, in an amazing body He formed in the womb for us, in a beautiful setting where the creative genius of God was most pointedly displayed, my friend challenged me to provide evidence for God’s existence. And so it is with all unbelievers. They breathe and see the trees bending in the wind and ask for evidence of air. Where in the universe does evidence for God not exist? Unbelief is sin and reveals a heart in need of repentance and faith because it is a choice of the will contrary to the evidence. To the extent that unbelief arises from a lack of evidence, it would be reasonable and innocent. The blame for unbelief would lie with God’s inadequate provision of evidence and not the unbelieving response in the heart of the unbeliever. However, Scripture clearly teaches that the responsibility and guilt of unbelief lies with the unbeliever’s rejection of the truth from hostility toward God and dislike of the implications of His existence and demands on their life. Therefore, all arguments for the existence of God, like the evidence of God that constantly surrounds the unbeliever at all times, will be viewed in a manner that justifies unbelief. And while belief in the specifics of the Gospel of Christ requires the special revelation of Scripture, the rebel’s unwillingness

to worship, give thanks, or actively pursue a right relationship with God is willful and blameworthy. Unbelievers know better, despite their objections to the contrary.

No neutral or innocent unbelievers exist, only rebels

It follows, then, that how one views and interprets God and His universe are moral issues, determined by one's nature. Believers love the display of God's power and genius in His world and gladly accept the implications of our dependence on God in all things. Unbelievers, however, wrongly suppress the evidence of God and His truth in Scripture from hostility toward God. The desire to be one's own authority and independent from God prevails in the heart of unbelief. The marks of God's genius and lordship in the universe continually call this evil desire to account, reminding would-be-independent sinners of their responsibility before God and their crime of ignoring Him. Yet, "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:32).

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

The glaring evidence for God in the universe rains on the parade of unbelief and dispels the illusion of the rebel's independence. Unbelievers, then, refuse to view the evidence with neutral objectivity because the implications of a right interpretation are too damning of their pretended freedom from God and His judgment. All evidence of the existence and nature of God will be suppressed. One of the more telling illustrations of this reality is the acceptance of the theory of evolution. Apart from the severe lack of compelling scientific evidence for the theory, the idea that universal and uniform laws are founded on random chance and that everything came

from nothing is absurd. Yet, the popularity and irrationality of believing such an impossible and unscientific explanation of the universe make sense in light of the antipathy people have toward the obvious explanation and its implications for their life. People will believe the ludicrous if they despise the alternative.

Consider the crowds shouting, “Hosanna!” at Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. A short week later they shouted, “Crucify Him!” Yet most, if not all of the crowd knew well the many convincing miracles of Christ before they shouted for His death. Many ate of the loaves and fishes. Some saw Lazarus brought back from the dead. Scripture tells us that multitudes were amazed and gave glory to God for the many miracles of Christ’s earthly ministry. The shouts of “Crucify!” came not from a lack of evidence, but from fickle hearts who feared the religious leaders and saw their conqueror of Rome under the power and punishment of Rome.

The world will be interpreted according to our desire to love and honor or avoid and reject God. Disinterested, neutral, and objective observers of the universe do not exist. Our explanation of how we know anything (epistemology) will be determined by our view of God, either positively or negatively. This applies to everyone.

Endnotes

- ¹ Sin is the one and only exception. Sin has its beginning in the will of created beings.
- ² The study of the nature of God, humanity, and reality is sometimes called “metaphysics,” the study of ultimate authority, truth, and knowledge is called “epistemology,” and how we should live is called “ethics.”
- ³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981; revised edition, 1982), 19.
- ⁴ For additional problems related to the progress of scientific understanding as conducted by fallible human beings, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- ⁵ Proverbs 15:15 and 17:22, respectively.
- ⁶ Proverbs 16:2: “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.”
- ⁷ This is a central aspect of Van Til’s apologetic and a key argument against both atheism and agnosticism. How could one of such human limitations possibly say that God does not or could not exist, or make any definitive statements about God at all? For a simple and practical treatment of the implication of this basic truth see Craig Biehl, *The Box: Answering the Faith of Unbelief* (Horsham, PA: Pilgrim’s Rock Press, 2014).
- ⁸ A significant and protracted controversy erupted between Cornelius Van Til and Gordon Clark concerning God’s incomprehensibility and knowledge, including the correspondence of human knowledge with God’s knowledge. While I am greatly simplifying the complexity of the debate, central to the controversy was Gordon Clark’s contention that Van Til’s qualitative and quantitative distinction between human and divine knowledge implied that human knowledge of truth was impossible. While not without ambiguous language, Van Til affirmed human knowledge of truth concerning God and His world, as derived from God’s revelation of truth, while maintaining a proper distinction between the created being and God. And while other factors may have contributed to the heat and duration of the controversy, including “unclear polemics on both sides,” as Bahnsen put it, it appears that Clark did not fully understand Van Til’s qualification of human knowledge in emphasizing the distinction between the Creator and creature. See Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 225, fn 147; 227, fn 152; 228, fn 159; 231, fn168; 242, fn 194; Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1974), 159-173; John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 29-40.
- ⁹ Lewis notes that natural law, what he called the “Tao” for the purpose of emphasizing its universality, is self-evident to all people, even if they deny it. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., 1944; Harper-One reprint, 2001), 83.

- ¹⁰ They borrow the morality of Christianity, or live within a culture that has vestiges of Christian morality built into its mores and traditions. In any event, they have a God-given conscience with the law of God written on their hearts, even if they insist on denying the God who gave it to them. See Romans 2:14-15. This will be more fully discussed in the chapters that follow.
- ¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ: A Curse on Christianity, in The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); 4, §2.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 15, §18.
- ¹³ Corrie ten Boom later wrote a book entitled *The Hiding Place*, the account of her family's activities in saving the Jews and her subsequent experience in the Nazi concentration camp. The book was originally published in 1971.
- ¹⁴ Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (Chosen Books, 1971; Bantam Books, 1974), 160.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.
- ¹⁶ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, 34.
- ¹⁷ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 65.
- ¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 448.
- ¹⁹ Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 4:7 and John 3:27, respectively.
- ²⁰ To be discussed further under God's righteousness.
- ²¹ See Craig Biehl, *The Infinite Merit of Christ: The Glory of Christ's Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2009), 100-101.
- ²² Romans 8:7, Colossians 1:21.
- ²³ See John 1:9; Romans 1:19, 2:14-15.
- ²⁴ Calvin writes, "All men of sound judgment will therefore hold, that a sense of Deity is indelibly engraven on the human heart. And that this belief is naturally engendered in all, and thoroughly fixed as it were in our very bones, is strikingly attested by the contumacy [defiance] of the wicked, who, though they struggle furiously, are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God. Though Diagoras, and others of like stamp, make themselves merry with whatever has been believed in all ages concerning religion, and Dionysius scoffs at the judgment of heaven, it is but a Sardonian grin; for the worm of conscience, keener than burning steel, is gnawing within them." Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.3, quoted in Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 88.

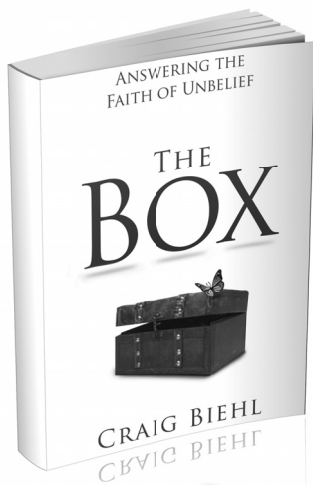
- ²⁵ See Romans 1:32, where we read of the most depraved of sinners understand that “those who practice such things deserve to die.” Elizabeth Anderson writes, “Every stable society punishes murder, theft, and bearing false witness; teaches children to honor their parents; and condemns envy of one’s neighbor’s possessions, at least when such envy leads one to treat one’s neighbors badly. People figured out these rules long before they were exposed to any of the major monotheistic religions. This fact suggests that moral knowledge springs not from revelation but from people’s experiences in living together, in which they have learned that they must adjust their own conduct in light of others’ claims.” “If God Is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?” in *The Portable Atheist*, ed. by Christopher Hitchens (Da Capo Press, 2007), 334. Indeed, “they figured out these rules” because they were created in God’s image with a conscience. God wrote His law on every heart.
- ²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 224, 225. Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John Edwin Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 298, 299. Hereafter the Banner of Truth and Yale versions will be designated by “BT” and “Yale,” respectively. “The gospel of the blessed God does not go abroad a-begging for its evidence, so much as some think; it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself.” Edwards, *Religious Affections*; BT, 233; Yale, 307. Calvin writes, “Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.” John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.7.2.
- ²⁷ James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919; reprint, Quinta Press, 2012), 179–180. Accessed February 16, 2014, http://www.quintapress.macmate.me/PDF_Books/Reconciliation_v1.pdf.
- ²⁸ The background of this brief discussion of God’s purpose to display His glory through the person and work of Christ in redeeming unworthy sinners can be seen in the exposition of Jonathan Edwards’ understanding of the ultimate purpose of God in Biehl, *The Infinite Merit of Christ*.

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