Lesson 1— GOD

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

[Genesis 1:1]

GOD. Does He exist? How can we know? Where is the evidence of God's existence? If God does exist, what is He like? Has God revealed Himself to mankind? If so, how? Can we know Him? After all, if God made everything, then who made God?

Philosophers and theologians have been pondering such existential questions for thousands of years. Man's quest for God has not ceased since the dawn of creation, precisely because it was our Creator who placed the innate sense of eternity within our hearts [*Ecclesiastes 3:11*]. The ancients intuitively knew that God is inescapable, inevitable. Atheism (*naturalism*) was virtually nonexistent in the ancient world, as every culture exercised some belief in the supernatural origin of man and the universe.

With roots planted in the European Enlightenment, atheism truly began to flourish in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries in the wake of Darwinian evolution. For the first time in history, man had developed an alternative belief system that could explain away God by attempting to understand all of reality through a purely naturalistic framework. Ironically, even Darwin himself tried his hand as a theologian before becoming the father of naturalistic evolution.

By effectively removing God from the equation, man is no longer morally accountable to the Creator and therefore can define his own truth. As one can see, atheism directly appeals to the depravity of the human heart and has become a convenient belief system for millions who would rather deny God and suppress the truth of His existence.

But is atheism really a legitimate belief system? Can we truly understand and explain the natural world around us without a supernatural Creator? Is the science really in favor of naturalistic evolution, or does the evidence tell a different story?

Is God even necessary?

The Law of Logic

Traditionally, philosophers, scientists, and theologians have argued in favor of the existence of God by using many convincing logical proofs. For those who outrightly reject Biblical authority, logic can potentially create a bridge to the atheist.

For example, Anselm (1033-1109 A.D.) — the Bishop of Canterbury — used logic to establish the existence of God. His argument begins with the premise that God — if He exists — must be the greatest conceivable being, whether real or imaginary. Since reality is inherently superior to imaginary concepts, then God, as the most superior conceivable being, must be real. Therefore God exists.

Anselm likewise proposed that if God is the greatest conceivable being, then His existence could never be dependent (*contingent*) upon anything else because that immediately would reduce God to being less than something else. God could never be less than anything; therefore, God exists by necessity. He is by nature the only necessary being, which means that the existence of everything else in the universe is contingent upon God.

As you can see, logic can be useful in making a reasonable case for belief in God, and while logic is important for critical thinking and self-evident by nature, it does have its limitations, which is where faith (*belief*) enters the picture. Faith and reason do not necessarily contradict, but at some point, God requires us to rise above reason and believe in Him. In other words, faith will force us eventually to transcend beyond the limits of logic without violating the laws of logic. True faith is not blind. True faith stands on the strong foundation of logic only to give us a clearer view into the deeper realties of our existence.

> *"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 … And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." [Hebrews 11:3, 6]*

Faith is essential to the Christian and is the central theme of the entire story of redemption — "*the righteous shall live by faith.*" But don't be fooled into thinking that only Bible-believing Christians exercise faith, while atheists only operate in the realm of scientific "fact." Nothing could be further from the truth. All things considered, the atheist actually is required to exercise much more faith than the Biblical creationist. As theologian and author Dr. Norman Geisler once concluded, "*I don't have enough faith to be an atheist.*"

As we will see in later lessons, the scientific evidence overwhelmingly is on the side of intelligent design and supernatural creation, while the atheist is required to take a giant leap of faith. After all, only a blind faith would embrace the notion that nothing created everything by chance. When carried to its logical conclusion, naturalism is absurd.

God is necessary to make sense of reality, and therefore as we study origins, God is the only logical place to begin. As we will see, atheism is not a logically tenable framework of reality, and it provides no legitimate answers to the primary and fundamental questions of life.

The Biblical narrative presumes the existence of a Creator God from the opening line, and everything else naturally follows. Atheists may refuse to acknowledge the existence of God, but actually it is God who does not believe in atheists. God's word says that everyone intuitively knows that He exists, and if we are honest with ourselves, we know that to be true.

The truth is that no atheist ultimately denies God on account of intellectual objection or scientific evidence. NO! It is much simpler than that. It is a matter of the human heart.

> *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good." [Psalm 14:1]*

The atheist represents the epitome of foolishness because he deliberately denies what is intuitively undeniable. There is a God who created us and gave us life. That same God holds us morally responsible for our life, and one day we will give an account to Him.

You see, when we begin to understand that atheism is not an intellectual issue but rather a moral issue, then we will begin to understand why so many cannot allow for the possibility of God's existence. To do so would be moral suicide. As famous evolutionist Aldous Huxley once said, "*the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.*"

When we are willing to start with God, however, we will discover that we can understand and explain the world around us while maintaining both logical consistency and moral integrity. If God does exist — which He most certainly does — then we had better discover as much as possible about Him so that ultimately we can know Him for who He is — both Creator and Lord!

As we will see, the opening lines of Genesis may provide more than we know about the nature of our Creator God and the relationship He has established with His creation.

General Revelation

The opening lines of Genesis introduce us to our Creator, or God, which is conveyed by the Hebrew word *Elohim*. The Bible claims to be the very word of God — His ***special revelation*** to mankind — which means that God has chosen to personally reveal who He is to mankind through His word, and ultimately through His Son, Jesus Christ [*Hebrews 1:1-3*].

Yet even for those who never have access to God's word or who happen to reject the Bible altogether, God has not left the world without a witness. For those who have not received the special revelation of the Bible, God gives us ***general revelation*** through His creation. While the creation itself provides enough evidence for "a" Creator, general revelation is not enough to inform about who the Creator is. Likewise, we can learn some things about God's nature through general revelation, but not everything, which is why the special revelation of God's word is so important.

> *"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." [Romans 1:19-20]*

Q & A

- Read Hebrews 11:1-6. What is faith and why is it necessary to please God? Discuss.

- Read Romans 1:19-20 above. What does this passage tell us about the relationship between Creator and His creation? What does it mean that man is with "without excuse?"

- Read Psalm 19:1-4. How does the creation declare the glory of God? What general qualities of God can we understand by observing the creation alone?

- Do you know anyone who claims to be an atheist? If so, what are his/her primary objections to believing in God? Do you think they would change their mind if provided enough evidence for God? Why or why not?