



THE REALITY OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

QUEST LESSON A-1

The Problem: How can we know that God really exists? There have been many millions of believers in every age who have not doubted His existence, and there are millions in our world today who are sure that they know God.

Knowing God and being sure of His existence are not the same as being able to prove His existence. Can the existence of God be proved? It depends upon what you mean by proof. If you are looking for scientific proof by which experiments can be conducted under controlled conditions and undoubted conclusions drawn, you cannot "prove" the existence of God. The Deity cannot be put in a test-tube.

Scientific proof is possible only in a very limited area of life. Mathematical, chemical, or physical proofs are limited to very narrow segments of thought and discovery. Logical proofs only have validity if the premises (or first statements) are undeniably true. Many logical proofs may be upset by the premises being seriously challenged.

Most of life is outside the realm of mathematical, laboratory or logical proof. For example, how would you prove scientifically the superiority of honor, justice, loyalty, or love? How would a man prove scientifically that his wife loves him? He may have very strong evidence one way or another, but is that "proof?" The fact is that most of life depends on enormous probabilities. Quite often people are convicted of murder, not on the basis of absolutely certain fact, but on the basis of probability. People have been hanged or condemned to life in prison on the testimony of honest citizens who were mistaken in their identifications, or incorrect in their perception of what happened. Yet the "proof" of guilt was accepted and the accused condemned.

People who reject the existence of God often think that faith is a matter of putting blinders on your eyes. They fail to realize that faith is by no means peculiar to religion. It is found in every area of life. We use faith when we go into a restaurant to eat, when we put our money in the bank, when we get on a bus, or an airplane.

We use faith when we send our children to school. The teachers might poison their minds. We use a great deal of faith when we are married. Think of the staggering divorce rate! All life is lived by faith! Why should we be surprised when we are confronted by the need of faith in religion?

It is not possible to provide scientific proof for the existence of God. But it is possible to be aware of such impressive evidence that you are willing to pray and experiment, and so have a personal certainty which allows you to say, "I know God." What is that evidence?

Objectives

First, we will consider the evidence of intuition.

Second, we will briefly examine classical arguments from reason.

Third, what evidence is contained in Scripture?

Fourth, it is necessary to study the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Fifth, we will discuss whether it is possible to know God from personal experience?

I. The Testimony of Intuition

"Intuition" is "the immediate knowing or learning of something without the conscious use of reasoning; instantaneous apprehension. Mankind everywhere believes in a God or gods because of an intuitive response to the things he sees and hears.

In his little book, *Give God a Chance*, William E. Sangster explains:

"There are some things we know without being told. We didn't read them in a book. They didn't have to be knocked into us by our teachers. No scientific experiment was necessary to prove them. We just knew them.

We always knew. . . that love was better than hate and kindness than cruelty. . . . We always knew other things as well.

We always knew that beauty pulled us. People vary in the way they respond to beauty, but all feel it in a flower, in a landscape, in a sunset, in a symphony . . . it needed no justification. Its 'proof' was in itself.

We always knew that truth was better than a lie however convenient lying might be on occasion! Nor was it truth only in the conversation of day to day but truth in its deepest sense the truth of things. What a thrill to solve a problem and find the truth!

We always knew that goodness was better than badness even if it appealed to us more in some lovely deed of sacrifice than in strict obedience to a high moral code. Who can be unmoved by the goodness of Elizabeth Pilenko, the Russian nun who, on Good Friday, 1945, saw a hysterical girl in the queue for the gas chamber at Ravensbruck Concentration Camp and said, 'Don't be frightened. Look, I'll take your turn. . . .' and went to death in her place?

Beauty, truth, goodness . . . how real and high they are! Even when we spurn them, we know in ourselves that we are spurning the best. How do we know? We just do! They are inside us. Animals don't feel like this. We have sight and insight.

If we follow these insights, they lead us to a being to whom beauty, truth, goodness are supremely precious. Thus *The Way of Intuition* also is a way worthy of respect." (p. 22)

The Word

1. What does the Bible say about mankind's intuitive knowledge of God? Romans 1:18-20; Acts 14:17.
2. What did the Psalmist write about nature as a revelation of God? Psalm 19:1; 97:6.
3. What does the Bible say about the person who denies God's existence? Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:28; (compare Jeremiah 5:12; 1 John 2:22).

Explanation: The Bible teaches that our intuitive knowledge of God comes directly from Him. "God hath shewed it unto them" (Romans 1:19). People are without excuse, not because they are given scientific proof, but because God Himself impresses their minds as they view the things He has created. We know intuitively, without a human teacher and without books, because God's impressions upon our minds are the source of the intuition. That is why the Bible writer so confidently calls the atheist a fool; not because he is dumb or ignorant, but because he denies the impressions implanted in his mind by God Himself. Intuitive knowledge of God is convincing evidence of His existence.

Relevance: Do you believe the impressions regarding His existence which God brings to your mind?

II. The Testimony of Reason

Through the ages Christian philosophers have used their reasoning faculties to arrive at five arguments for the existence of God. Even though none of them is a proof, each has some value as supportive evidence.

1. The argument from cause (the cosmological argument).

Reason tells us that all existing things have an adequate cause. The universe, the world, and mankind must have been caused. The original cause must be a supreme Being, whom we call God.

2. The argument from design (the teleological argument)

Our world reveals order, intelligence, harmony, purpose. The existence of such order or design implies the existence of an intelligent Being who is the original Designer. This Being is God. Such an argument from design to Designer requires

less faith to believe than the idea that it "just happened." Would anyone believe, for example, that a truck driver dumped a heap of rubble by the River Thames and it just happened to turn into Westminster Abbey?

3. The argument from being (the ontological argument)

This argument was stated best by Anselm. He pointed out that man has in his mind the idea of an absolutely perfect being. Existence is an attribute of perfection. Therefore there must be in existence an absolutely perfect Being, God.

4. The moral argument (the anthropological argument)

Man has a moral sense of what is right and wrong, of what he "ought" and "ought not" to do. He often ignores this "categorical imperative" (Kant), but it is there just the same. The existence of such a sense of right and wrong implies the existence of a supreme Being who gave it to us. He is the Lawgiver and Judge who has the absolute right to command us. Our moral sense is a thumb-print of the Great Hand that created us.

5. The historical argument (the ethnological argument)

The peoples of every nation, tribe, and culture of this earth have had a basic sense of the divine. This has resulted in their particular modes of worship. Even though the mode of worship may be primitive, it reveals the acceptance of God's existence, or the existence of a number of gods. If the nature of man is inclined to worship, this can only be explained by the existence of a supreme Being who has made man a religious individual.

The Word

4. What does the Bible say about the quest for God by means of reason alone? Job 11:7; 37:23; Ecclesiastes 8:17; Isaiah 40:28.
5. Is there any place at all for reason in religion? Isaiah 1:18; Romans 12:1.

Explanation: The Bible teaches that reason alone cannot discover God. He chooses to reveal Himself as our Savior from sin and as our Guide through life, but He hides from us the infinite mysteries of His Person. The arguments from reason provide a strong probability of the existence of God. Accepting the probability, and then seeking Him in the way His Word suggests, results in certainty of His existence.

Relevance: Do you admit the inadequacy of your reasoning powers in the search for ultimate truth? Have you sought God through His revelation in the Bible?

III. The Testimony of the Scriptures

The Bible writers never attempt to give proofs for the existence of God. His existence is assumed. They offer evidence that the Scriptures are God's inspired Word which possesses unique qualities.

The Word

6. What does the Bible claim in respect to God's ability to predict the future? Isaiah 46:9-10; (compare Isaiah 42:93; Daniel 2:28; Acts 3:18; 15:18; Romans 8:29).
7. From what source did the prophets receive their messages? 2 Peter 1:19-21.
8. What special effect does God's Word have upon the listener? Hebrews 4:12; (compare Ephesians 6:17).

Explanation: The Bible is not like any other book. Because it is the Word of God it is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to those who read it or hear it. No other writers compare with the Bible writers in their capacity to make detailed predictions of future events. In later lessons we will study very significant Bible prophecies which give evidence of the supernatural source of the Scriptural message. The Bible is the revelation of Himself which God has given to the world.

Relevance: Have you sought for God by studying the Bible? It is that very enterprise that we would like to encourage. As we search the Scriptures together, we will gain a clearer view of the character of God, and a greater appreciation of the salvation He offers.

IV. The Testimony of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ claimed to be the supreme Deity manifest as a man among men. He declared that the only way to know God is to know Himself. The documentary evidence for the life of Jesus is more complete than for the life of any other character in ancient history. As we search the records we come to know Jesus as an historical figure. Then if we accept Him as Savior, He reveals God to us.

The Word

9. By what means did Jesus say we can come to know God? Matthew 11:27; John 14:9; (compare John 12:45).
10. What relationship between Himself and God the Father did Jesus claim? John 5:18; 8:58-59 (compare Exodus 3:13-14) 5) 10:30, 38.
11. Why did some of the Jews urge that people not listen to Jesus' teaching? John 10:20.
12. On the basis of what accusations did they eventually condemn Jesus to death? Luke 23:2; Mark 14:61-64; John 19:12.

Explanation: Jesus claimed to be God the Son, equal to, and mysteriously One with God the Father. When asked was He divine, He answered, "I am" (Mark 14:62; compare Matthew 26:63-64). Either He was telling the truth, or He was mad, as they accused Him of being, or He was an imposter making false claims for Himself. Jesus was God, made, or bad. In none of the documents of Christianity (the New Testament and early Christian writings) is there the slightest evidence that Jesus was insane or a liar. He was accused of both, but the evidence belies the accusations. Insane men do not teach as Jesus did. Liars and imposters do not command the undying respect of millions over a period of centuries. "You can fool some of the people some of the time."

If Jesus were not mad or bad, when He claimed to be God He must have been telling the truth; because good men in their right minds don't tell lies!

Relevance: Have you sought for God by coming to know Jesus?

V. The Testimony of Personal Experience

Is it possible to know God from personal experience? It most certainly is! In fact a personal friendship with God is the only kind of knowledge of Him that is of lasting value. To know about Him is one thing, to know Him by entering into a spiritual relationship with Him is quite another thing. It is this latter experience that Jesus and all the Bible writers earnestly endeavored to encourage. As we have seen, knowing Christ is knowing God. Hence, Jesus constantly urged that people accept Him as Savior and Lord. This is the knowledge of God that the Scriptures were written to foster.

The Word

13. Why did John say he wrote his Gospel? John 20:31.
14. Who did Jesus say we would find as we study the Scriptures? John 5:39; (compare Luke 24:27, 44).
15. How may we have eternal life? John 17:3, 23.
16. What certainty did Bible writers have that they knew God? Ephesians 3:19; Philippians 3:8-11; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 John 2:5.

Explanation: The whole Bible is a revelation of the character of God. Knowing Him is not a mere intellectual matter; it is a beautiful spiritual experience. As you see Him in His Word and in prayer, the Lord comes to you (John 14:18) and reveals His love and truth to your heart. Your relationship with God is the source of peace, joy, and happiness in service for Him and others. God has not revealed much in His Word about His nature. But he has revealed a great deal about His

character. He is presented as an infinitely loving, saving God who "is not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). He is also infinitely just, and has no choice but to turn away from those who refuse to come to know Him (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Relevance: Eternal life in fellowship with our infinitely loving God is awaiting you if you are willing to know Him? Are you willing to pray to God that He will give you a knowledge of Himself? Will you commit yourself to searching the Scriptures for an ever deeper knowledge of God?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. No one can know God until they can prove His existence scientifically.
 - b. There is no place for reason in Christianity.
 - c. Only God can successfully predict the future in any degree of detail.
 - d. To know Jesus Christ is to know God.

2. Discuss: The best way to know God is to accept Him by faith. Then He is able to reveal Himself to your heart. But He gives us external evidence of His existence. What evidences of God's existence are most meaningful to you?