

Chapter 2

The Claims of Christianity and Proof of the Supernatural

Why is Christianity under attack?

The very fact that so many of you have chosen to attend a class on apologetics, and that there is a wealth of material written on the subject, is ample proof that Christianity is under attack. America has moved into a post-Christian culture, where the tenets of Christianity are considered irrelevant and, in many cases, repugnant. We find ourselves today in much the same situation as the earliest of Christians. Our culture is predominantly pagan. People worship a multiplicity of "gods": money, prestige, convenience, leisure, pleasure, power, self-esteem, etc. The Christian faith is a threat to their lifestyle and to their ideologies. No longer content to merely ignore Christianity, the general populace has begun to take a stance of actually attacking it. Anyone with a Christian perspective on a social issue is labeled "ultra-conservative" or "radical," or a "religious zealot." But why? In a country that was founded on religious freedom and has prospered from the efforts of Christian men and women, why is there such animosity toward Christianity in recent decades?

Some of the conflict has to do with a radical change in our way of thinking. One author described the change as a series of bumper stickers. In the Middle Ages, the sticker read "Let the Church Think for You." It was a time of blind faith and adherence to the dictates of the church. During the time of the Enlightenment, the bumper sticker changed to "I Can Think for Myself." The Age of Reason dawned and people began to determine for themselves what they would believe. They used their minds to reason. For some, it brought them closer to the faith, for others, it drove them away. The motto for the past 20 years or so has changed drastically. Now it is, "Don't Think, Feel." We've entered an age when rational understanding itself is considered irrelevant. Everything depends on how you feel. This is why an entire country can put an immoral president in office who makes them feel good. As the song popular in the 80s taught, "It can't be wrong when it seems so right." It's not unusual to hear many of these maxims in a single week: "If it feels good, do it," "You have to do what's right for you," or "It doesn't matter what you believe, only that you're sincere." Truth no longer matters, only one's feelings toward truth. Author Steven Collins dubs this modern-day paganism "Pansubjectivism," the limitation of knowledge to subjective experience.¹ With Pansubjectivism, there are no absolutes. People don't need to think rationally, only experientially. Situational ethics becomes the norm (each person deciding for himself or herself what is right in any given situation). Evidence becomes irrelevant. This is the predominant view of most people we come in contact with today. It is no wonder they are so uncomfortable with Christianity. "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

What are the claims of Christianity?

1. There is one personal God who can be known.

As Christians, we believe in a God who is more than just a "force" or "guiding principle." New Age proponents and many Eastern religions believe in a pantheistic "god." God is everything. He is in the trees and the sky and the wind. All that we see is part of "god." But their god is unknowable and impersonal. This is not the God of Christianity. The entire Bible is God's attempt to make Himself and His plan of salvation for His people known. What do these verses teach about God?

Psalms 96:5 *For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.*

Psalms 76:1e *In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel.*

Ezekiel 38:23 *And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.*

Psalms 98:2 *The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.*

John 1:18 *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

Isaiah 57:15 *For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

2. Sin separates us from God.

ōThe Christian faith teaches men these two truths: There is a God whom men are capable of knowing, and they have a corrupt nature which makes them unworthy of him. It is equally important for men to know both of these points. It is as equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own sinfulness as it is for him to know about his sinfulness without knowing the Redeemer who can cure him. Knowing only one of these aspects leads either to the arrogance of the philosophers, who have known God but not their own sinfulness, or to the despair of the atheists, who know their own wretched state without knowing their Redeemer.ö²

Habakkuk 1:13a *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.*

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Isaiah 64:5-6 *You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

Isaiah 59:1-2 *Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

3. Jesus' shed blood on the cross brings reconciliation to God.

John 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

Romans 5:8-9 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

Hebrews 9:12-14 *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

4. **Jesus is the only way to heaven.**

This third point is a crucial one. Contrary to the mantra of the "religious" and pseudo-religious of our day, "there are many roads to heaven," Christianity teaches that there is only one way. What does the Bible say?

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

John 3:18 *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*

Acts 4:12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

1 John 5:12 *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*

5. **Jesus Christ is God.**

Has anyone ever told you that "we all worship the same God"? The Muslims worship Allah, the Jews worship the God of the Old Testament. It really doesn't matter what we call Him, does it? In the Christian view, it does. Jesus Christ, honored as a prophet by Muslims but ignored by the Jews, is God. See what the following verses reveal about who God really is.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

John 5:18 *For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

John 8:24 *I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be [literally, eigo eimi, the "I Am" of Exodus 3], you will indeed die in your sins.*

John 8:56-59 *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

John 10:30-33 *"I and the Father are one." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

John 18:6 *When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.*

John 20:28 *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

Colossians 2:9 *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,*

6. **Following Christ requires obedience.**

Perhaps this is the reason, more than any other, why people consciously reject Christ. They don't want to be accountable to anyone for their actions.

Matthew 7:21-23 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

Galatians 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

1 John 2:3-6 *We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*

1 John 3:9-10 *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.*

Luke 14:25-33 *...”If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

Can you see why Christianity is so offensive? It is exclusive and absolute. You either believe what the Bible says about God, sin, salvation and redemption, or you’re WRONG in what you believe, no matter how sincere you are. There is only one way, and it is absolute. For a generation that believes in no absolutes and the subjective nature of everything, including religion, this view is not only incomprehensible, it is utterly repugnant. No wonder Christianity is so vehemently attacked!

What is at stake?

Many of us want to defend Christianity simply because we don’t want to be perceived as being wrong or unintelligible. We want to vindicate our own choice of faith. But there is more at stake than self-defense. Eternal life hangs in the balance. Those who are skeptical or hostile to the faith are in danger of spending eternity in hell, in eternal punishment and insufferable torment.

Blaise Pascal had an interesting way of looking at this. His argument is today known as “Pascal’s Wager.”³ A coin is being tossed in the air that will either come up heads or tails. You must decide which to choose, and you are constrained to make a choice. Suppose you call heads, that God exists. “If you win you win everything, but if you lose you lose nothing.”³ Eternal life and happiness, reasons Pascal, are at stake. If you choose tails, that God does not exist, and you win, you win very little. But if you lose, you lose everything for eternity. Pascal asks, “What do you have to lose?”

“Now what harm will come to you by choosing this course of action? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a true and genuine friend. In fact, you will no longer find yourself swamped by poisonous pleasures, such as those of lust and desire for fame. But won’t you have anything else? I assure you that you will gain in this life, and that with every step you take along this way, you will realize you have bet on something sure and infinite which has cost you nothing.”⁴

How do you prove God exists?

Nothing is more frustrating than confronting an absolute atheist, someone who believes God doesn’t exist. These classical proofs for the existence of God are here given to help you show an atheist that the existence of God is indeed a rational possibility.

1. The Ontological Argument

This argument basically states that God exists because we have a concept of God. If we can imagine God in our minds, then He must exist. This argument was perfected by Anselm (1033-1109), and goes something like this:

É God is the greatest conceivable being (a being than which none greater can be conceived). This statement is true by definition.

É Such a being exists in our understanding, but a being that could exist in both our understanding and also in reality would be greater still. Therefore, God must exist in reality as well as in the understanding.

Now, you might argue that you can imagine a unicorn in your mind, but it certainly doesn't exist. But the components of the unicorn do. You can imagine a horse, because one exists, and you can imagine what a horn would look like on one (since you've seen one on a rhinoceros). But what if I told you to imagine a pentadoctal snufflebuss? You can't possibly conceive of what that would look like, can you? Of course not. But if an image immediately popped into your mind, and into the mind of most everyone else who heard the term, then we would have to conclude that it exists. This is difficult logic, to be sure, but very convincing to a great many people. From the earliest of times people have worshipped God (or gods). In fact, every pagan religion has a concept of God and worships some form of a god. Where would they get such a concept? Why has every culture from as far back as we can trace, worshipped some type of supreme being? Because God has stamped His image on our hearts. He has put within every one of us a concept of Himself. Some may have mistaken understandings, to be sure, but everyone has some idea of God. Even the atheist who says there is no God must have an idea of God to reject.

Another way of stating the ontological argument is like this: òa being whose non-existence is inconceivable is greater than a being whose non-existence is conceivable. But God is the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, God's non-existence must be inconceivable... Therefore God must exist.ö

òHe exists not because we have an idea of it, but because we *cannot not* have an idea of it. It is impossible to think of the non-existence of infinite being because we cannot think of pure nonbeing or nothing... *infinite being must exist because we cannot conceive of its not existing... Because we can logically conceive of the non-existence of the finite, we suppose that we can of the infinite.*ö

2. The Cosmological Argument

The word òcosmosö means order, and this argument is predicated on the order we see in the world we live in. Everything has a beginning, and everything that comes into existence must have a cause (that is, it is contingent on something else for its existence). The argument states that since we are all contingent beings, if there was ever a time when no contingent beings existed, nothing could come into existence. But there had to be a time when no contingent beings existed (since there cannot be an infinite regression of contingencies), so there must be a non-contingent Being which was responsible for bringing the contingent beings into existence. Therefore a non-contingent Being exists, which by definition we would call God.

Take any one item (the earth, a molecule, etc.) and look at the logical conclusions if it were not caused by God. How did it come to be? It is either an illusion (which you are relatively sure it is not), it is self-created, it is self-existent or it was created by something self-existent.⁷ Many people would try to persuade you that the object was self-created, that it came into existence by òchance.ö But òchanceö has no causal power to create anything. The idea of òspontaneous generationö was discarded by the end of the Middle Ages. By its very definition something can't be self-created, since it would have to exist before it was created in order to create itself. So maybe it's self-existent. To say that the earth itself or a molecule (or whatever else you fancy) has the power of being within itself and therefore is self-existent would be ludicrous. That would make it God. The only option is that it was created by Something that is self-existent, namely, God.

Thomas Aquinas used this argument in a slightly different fashion. He looked at the motion of everything in the universe: revolving and rotating planets, shooting stars, etc. Nothing can be put into motion unless acted on by an outside force. God, he asserted, was the òUnmoved Mover.ö He also argued from existence. Since everything that is caused is caused by something else, and you cannot have an infinite regression of causation, God is the òCause of Existence.ö⁸

Colossians 1:16-17 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.ö

3. The Teleological Argument

This argument, also referred to as Natural Theology, is perhaps the easiest for us to understand. God's Word expresses it this way: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1); "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

William Paley perfectly expressed this argument in 1804, when he compared stumbling upon a stone with stumbling upon a watch. You could very easily come upon a stone and, upon asking, "Where did this come from?" answer that it's always been there. But what if you found a watch? Even if you had never seen one before you could tell by looking at it that it had design and order and purpose and complexity. You would never say, "It's always been here." You would immediately assume someone had designed it. The Teleological Argument states that order implies order; design implies a designer. Whenever we see a purposeful event, it is produced by someone or something that had a purpose in producing it. Since there are an infinite variety of instances of means ordered to ends in nature, it implies the existence of a being with intelligence and power commensurate to the magnitude of its product. Look at the complexity of the human brain or the intricacies of a single cell. All of creation shows order and purpose and design. Who could create such incomprehensible things? Only God. Even Aristotle, who had no biblical revelation, was convinced of the reality of God because of this argument.

Perhaps a better illustration for people today would be that of a computer. A computer is extremely complex, and yet it cannot do anything it was not designed to do. It can do great things, mind you, but it is always limited by the expertise of the creator. None of us would ever assume that a computer, over billions of years, miraculously came into existence of its own accord. We know it had to be created by someone. The human brain is infinitely more complex than any computer system. And it had to be created by Someone even greater. There is no other conclusion than that there is a God.

4. The Moral Argument

Within each of us there is a "moral sense," the understanding of what we ought to do. In general, most people (regardless of culture or time in history) agree on what is morally right. A superlative standard exists by which we measure whether something is "better," "more noble," "more true," etc. There must be some type of objective standard. Therefore, there must be a God who put this moral sense into us. The argument cannot be made that morality is only relative. Almost universally we decry the atrocities of Hitler and the immorality of slavery or genital mutilation practiced in some cultures. Child abuse and murder are always wrong, and not just because our society has made them so.

5. The Argument from Religious Experience

The most profound of all the arguments for the existence of God just may be religious experience. It is extremely difficult to argue with someone's experience. The hymn writer wrote, "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart." The blind man healed by Jesus responded to his accusers, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25b). A changed life, an encounter with the Living God—these are proofs that He exists.

Note that all through history no one has ever tried to prove that God doesn't exist (you can't prove a negative). "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 14:1b). Only someone with infinite knowledge could prove that God doesn't exist. To do so you would have to be, well, er... God. And no one in Scripture ever attempted to prove His existence. It is self-evident. And it is futile to argue with a fool.

Blaise Pascal observed,

"The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human reasoning and so complicated that they make a general impression on people, and even if they did help, it would only be for that moment during which they observed the demonstration. An hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake.... That is a result of knowing God without Christ."⁹ When it comes right down to it, apart from Christ, the existence of God is largely

hidden from the unbeliever. “God desires to move the will rather than the mind... There is always enough light to illuminate the elect and enough obscurity to humble them. There is enough obscurity to blind the reprobate and enough light to condemn them and deprive them of any excuse.”¹⁰

Matthew 11:27 “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Isaiah 6:9 He said, “Go and tell this people: “‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’”

Isaiah 45:15 Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

Matthew 13:15 For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

But the proofs for the existence of God do serve a purpose. The logical corollary of the existence of God is the possibility of miracles. If God exists and in fact created the entire universe, why would He be unable to enter that universe and perform a miracle? Nothing would be too difficult! A belief that God can intervene in the affairs of the earth and suspend natural law is important when we begin to look at Scripture. Most historians reject the Bible simply because it contains miracles. They have a predisposition against the supernatural. “... The presupposition of modern biblical criticism has been the impossibility of miracles in history, so that a conservative approach to the Scriptures necessitates a prior defense of the possibility of miracles.”¹¹

End Notes

¹ Steven Collins, *Championing the Faith: A Layman’s Guide to Proving Christianity’s Claims* (Teacher’s Edition) (Tulsa: Virgil Hensley Publishing Co., 1991) p. 22.

² Blaise Pascal in *Mind on Fire: A Faith for the Skeptical and Indifferent*, James Houston, Ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), p. 148.

³ Ibid., p.130-133.

⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

⁵ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 79.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, et al. *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 108.

⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

⁸ Craig, p. 82.

⁹ Pascal, p. 150.

¹⁰ Pascal, p. 168.

¹¹ Craig, p. 54.

