

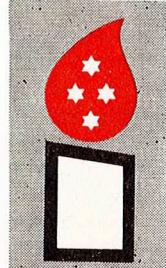
THE ANGLICAN INFORMATION CENTRE
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THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN AUSTRALIA DIOCESE OF SYDNEY

STUDY No.

1



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WHY BELIEVE IN GOD?

Introduction

This course is designed to answer the most basic questions ever asked by anyone — Why believe in God? Why believe in the Bible? What is wrong with man and his world? Who is Jesus Christ and why did He come? Answers to these questions will be drawn from the Bible and, sometimes, from the doctrinal basis of the Anglican Church.

You will find the notes of greatest value if you have a Bible in modern English and look up the references given. We recommend the Revised Standard Version of the whole Bible, or the Good News for Modern Man version of the New Testament. The New English Bible is another good modern translation. The Bible references will be given in this form — “Philippians 2:10”, which means verse 10 of chapter 2 of Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. Look up the index at the start of your Bible to find Philippians. Sometimes in the notes these references will be given in the footnotes, and this means that if you want to pursue extra study on that particular point, the Bible

references in the footnotes will help.

Although in the time of the writing of the Old and New Testaments there were no real atheists, since everyone believed in some god or other, today there are many who feel it is “unscientific” to believe in a supreme Deity. So that is the starting point for these notes.

The bare minimum

The Bible tells us, “Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him.”¹ It is not possible for the existence of God to be proved conclusively to a person who is a convinced atheist, for his mind is not open to the possibility. What is more, when we move into the spiritual realm, we find that people simply do not understand what we are talking about. The apostle Paul expressed this when he said, “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to under-

stand them because they are spiritually discerned.”² This does not mean that any spiritual quest is useless, for the very fact that a person is trying to know more about God means that God Himself is drawing them. Jesus said it this way: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”³ So seeking to know God is a great deal more than just increasing your knowledge in a specific field of human wisdom; it is entering into a new realm, where knowledge turns into experience. For to know God personally is entirely different from just knowing *about* Him. This can be proved from the thousands of children who are taught divinity in schools: they know a lot of information about God, and even pass exams on the subject, but many have no personal understanding of the God they have been studying.

God in nature

While the Bible never tries to *prove* God, it does believe that there is plenty of evidence for God in the universe which He has made and which He rules. David back in 1000 B.C. said: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.”⁴ When Job is hopelessly puzzled by God’s treatment of him, God reminds him of all the wonders of nature of which God is the creator,⁵ and Job finds this more convincing than any other argument.

The New Testament says the same thing. Romans 1:18-21 says: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the

creation of the world *His invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.* So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.” Nature then clearly testifies to God’s power and God’s sovereignty, but men simply take no notice of it. They reject the revelation that they have, and so are without excuse.

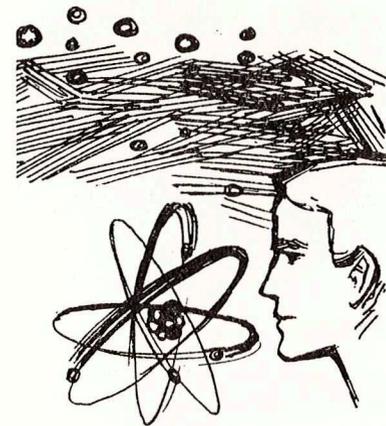
God in conscience

The apostle Paul also argues that man’s moral sense is an evidence for the existence of God. He says, “When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”⁶ In other words, the very existence of human conscience, even if the *content* of that conscience varies, is evidence for the existence of God. We all know instinctively that we should do what is right and avoid what is wrong. Why? Because, in Bible terms, man was made “in the image of God.”⁷ Humanity implies conscience, and conscience implies morals, and morals imply God.

Science versus the Bible

Since a whole generation is growing up today to believe that

evolution has disproved the Bible and therefore done away with any need to believe in a Supreme Being, it is important to deal with this problem now. Even though nature and conscience may lead a person



toward the conclusion that God exists, his understanding of science may lead him in the other direction. How does the Bible answer the theory of evolution?

First it is important to understand the way in which the first book of the Bible, Genesis, was written. History, in the sense with which we are familiar, does not begin until Genesis 12 with the story of Abraham. So Genesis 1 to 11 is “pre-history” — that is, it is a selection of events and ideas put together to reveal clearly a number of doctrines, in particular the doctrine that God exists absolutely, that all else is His creation, that He creates freely by His Word and Spirit, and that man is the summit of creation. As we move into Genesis 3, we find the doctrines that man is a sinner — he doubts God’s trustworthiness; he is ambitious to be independent; and he is arrogantly disobedient. He is also declared to

be under judgment — separated from God, with human relationships under strain, and fighting to survive in a hostile environment where death reigns. This is only a brief summary of the doctrines of Genesis 1 to 3, but it is enough to show that the Bible is trying to get across specific facts about the world and man’s nature; it is not written to describe the origins of man and his world in scientific language. If it comes to that, would you not think it a fraud if it did state man’s origin and development in modern scientific style?

Once you grasp that the Bible is a theological and not a scientific text-book, it is relatively easy to read Genesis and see the points it is trying to make. Human nature is in fact as it is described there; life is a struggle to survive against hostile elements and against cut-throat competition from other people; human relationships are continually strained, even within the home where there ought to be trust. How else can you explain man and his world? The Bible’s view is consistent, intelligible and reasonable.

Therefore the Bible’s account of creation is not necessarily in opposition to the theory of evolution, or any other theory of physical development; nor is it tied to any scientific view of history. It is a theological book, telling us about God who rules this world, and man who rebels against His rule.

To sum up, then, the Bible says that we ought to be able to see God from the world outside (nature) and the world inside (reason and conscience) even before we turn to the Bible at all. We have no need, either, to reject the Bible’s story of creation since we have seen that it is teaching doctrines not propounding scientific theories.

Can we know any more?

Will God then stay a shadowy figure, whom we worship from far off, having only a glimpse of Him every now and then in nature or in our own conscience? Fortunately, we can know a great deal more about Him. Our God is a God who has revealed Himself in the Bible (which we will look at in Study 2) and in the person of Jesus Christ (the subject of Study 4). Jesus in fact said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."⁸ If any person wants to know what God is like, he need only to look at the New Testament account of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. To understand Jesus' character is to get to know what God is like, of the Gospels right through (for You could not do better at this stage than sit down and read one example, Mark's Gospel) and get an idea of what Jesus was like.

So the revelation in nature and conscience, though real, is limited. We may understand that God is powerful, that He loves all men because He has created them, and that He has a kind nature. But from looking at Jesus we can understand so much more. For we see Him as

a God who reveals Himself in word and action, who cares for His people



at whatever cost to Himself, and who has reserved for them a place in heaven.

Bible references:

- 1 Hebrews 11:6
- 2 1 Corinthians 2:14
- 3 John 6:44
- 4 Psalm 19:1
- 5 Job chapters 38-39
- 6 Romans 2:14-16
- 7 Genesis 1:26
- 8 John 14:9

STUDY 2 answers the question "Why believe in the Bible?"

In preparation, think about these questions:

If God had not revealed Himself in some written way, what conclusions do you think men might have drawn about His character?

If the Bible is proved to be an accurate, historical document, what reasons are there for not taking notice of it?