



3. Knowing God

Italy, 1250 A.D. A priest named Thomas Aquinas believed in God, and also searched for logical ways to defend his faith. One of his observations involved the origin of the universe. As Aquinas observed, everything comes from something else. A tree comes from a seed, which comes from a tree, which comes from a seed - etc. But that chain of causes can't go on forever. There has to be a starting point, a "primary cause," from which the whole universe came into being. The only logical explanation for that primary cause, Aquinas argued, is an eternal and all-powerful God.

England, 1802 A.D. A pastor named William Paley believed in God, and also searched for logical ways to defend his faith. One of his observations involved the universe's complexity. Imagine that you hold a finely crafted pocketwatch. As you examine the beautiful device with its many moving parts, you can't help but marvel at the cleverness and skill of the watchmaker. The same thing goes for our universe. As we examine the intricate parts of the human body, or the precisely balanced rotation of the planets, we can't help but marvel at the cleverness and skill of the Maker. Something this complicated and beautiful could never have happened by accident.

Oxford University, 1943 A.D. A writer named C.S. Lewis did not believe in God. However, the more he looked at the world around him, the more he saw evidence for God in the morality of human beings. Lewis observed that people all over the world consider some actions to be "right," and other actions to be "wrong." For example, virtually everyone agrees that what Adolf Hitler tried to do in WWII was "wrong." But why? Where did human beings get this universal standard of morality? The only logical explanation is that we were created by a moral God. C.S. Lewis eventually became a devout Christian and wrote many books explaining and defending his faith.

Human philosophy clearly points to the **existence** of some kind of God, but it is unable to tell us exactly what that God is **like**. Fortunately, it doesn't have to. In this lesson we will also take a look at some important details God reveals about himself in the Bible.

HOW DOES GOD MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN TO HUMANS?

Psalm 19:1,4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. . . . their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the earth.

Romans 1:20 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 people are without excuse.

Romans 2:14,15 When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by law. . . .they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.

Words to Know

“Natural Knowledge of God” =

“Conscience” =

If we had no information about God to go on (other than our “natural knowledge” of him) what would we have to conclude that God is *like*?

Even though we find some information about God in the natural world, that information is very limited. So God has chosen a special way to make himself known to us. . .

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV84) No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

2 Timothy 3:15 From infancy you have known **the holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Words to Know

“Revealed Knowledge of God” =

The Bible reveals truths we would otherwise have no way of knowing - truths about how our world got here, what happened to it, and how a gracious God entered into our world to save, redeem, and restore.

WHAT SPECIAL INFORMATION IS REVEALED IN THE BIBLE?

1. NATURE AND THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

The Bible says that God created the universe, the earth, and all living things in six 24-hour days.

Read and discuss Genesis 1:1-2:1.

Note the differences between the Bible's account of creation and an atheistic, evolutionary explanation of the world. These two belief systems lead to drastically different worldviews.

	Bible	Atheistic Evolutionists
Time	6 days	Billions of years
Method	God speaks things into being	By chance or accident
Mankind	A special creation	A superior animal
Man's purpose	To serve and honor God	To survive, to serve self
Man's responsibility	To take care of the earth	None
Man's future	Eternal life for all who believe	None

This teaching of creation is not intended to be a “shocker.” The Bible is simply putting a finer point on things that people instinctively know (c.f. “natural knowledge of God” on the previous page.)

Why, then, do so many people refuse to believe that God created the world? Consider the following passages:

Romans 8:7 (NIV84) *The sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

Hebrews 11:3 *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

Our sinful nature hates the idea of being responsible to God. But God gives his children a new nature: a new heart of faith in Jesus, which trusts God and his loving care.

2.

THE LAW

Although our consciences bear witness to the existence of God, they are not perfect. They have been corrupted by our sinful nature. This is why even though most humans agree on the basics of morality, individuals may still have very different and sometimes very skewed ideas of right and wrong. In the Bible, God clears up any confusion by spelling out the exact standards of what is right and what is wrong. These standards are known as God's law.

For one well-known summary of God's law, see the 10 Commandments, given in Exodus 20:1-17.

Read & Discuss 10 Commandments: (Appendix A, p. 76-77)

Note that these laws are not intended to hurt us, but actually to help us show love to God and our neighbor.

Romans 13:10 Love is the fulfillment of the law.

1 John 5:3b His commands are not burdensome.

However, when we honestly compare our lives with all the things that God demands. . . .

Leviticus 19:2 Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

. . . .we see that we have not measured up to his standards.

Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

What effect, then, does God's law have on our hearts?

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The word “gospel” means “_____.” Instead of telling us what we should do, the Gospel tells us the good news about something that has already been done.

Hebrews 4:15 We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin.

John 3:16 (a.k.a. “the Gospel in a nutshell) God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The good news of the Gospel is that God sent Jesus to perfectly follow all God’s laws in your place, and to die for your sins on the cross. **You don’t have to do anything to get yourself to heaven - Jesus already did all of it for you.**

What effect, then, does God’s gospel have in our hearts?

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE

The reason we place so much value on God’s Word is because *this is the only place where we find the gospel*, the good news which assures us that we are going to heaven because of Jesus. Such a beautiful message could only have come from God himself.

2 Peter 1:21 (NIV84) For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed. . . .

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Discuss the difference between “absolute truth” and “relative truth.” Which one does the Bible claim to be? Why is that important?

TAKING IT DEEPER

Discuss “Is the New Testament Reliable?” - Appendix, p. 82-84

Agree or disagree?

- All people naturally know, deep down in their heart of hearts, that Jesus is their Savior.

- You must keep God’s law perfectly to be saved.

- Since the Bible was written almost 2000 years ago, we can’t be sure that our Bibles today contain the true word of God.

Law or Gospel?

Read the following passages, in write in the box to the left whether the passage is law or gospel.

<i>Law or Gospel?</i>	<i>Bible Passage</i>
	<i>Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.</i>
	<i>Galatians 4:4 God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.</i>
	<i>Romans 3:12 All have turned away. . .there is no one who does good, not even one.</i>
	<i>Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.</i>
	<i>Luke 10:27 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.</i>
	<i>Romans 3:23-24 There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.</i>
	<i>Philippians 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.</i>