

What Good is Belief in God?

Beyond belief, beyond proof

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**Dedicated
to those who seek
God
not only with their head
but also with their heart.**

*You look at what is beautiful, wonderful and right in
this world,
and maybe you are ready to believe in God.
Or, you see what is ugly, painful and wrong,
and you have second thoughts about believing.
Anyway, what good is belief in God
or in proof of his existence - per se?
Let's talk about it.*

Introduction

Several years ago I received an email from a woman whose daughter was temporarily working in Israel. The daughter used the words “somewhat interesting” and “crazy” to describe one of her experiences.

“Everything is okay here despite demonstrations, shootings, etc. What is somewhat interesting is that I was planning to take Bus 14 on Sunday morning and to get on that bus two stops BEFORE it exploded. But then, I called H_____ on Saturday evening to see if he could pick me up, and he did. Isn't that crazy?”

Many people would call this a coincidence. Others would call it divine intervention. How would *you* explain it?

There is compelling evidence that, at one time or another, God “speaks” to each one of us. It is our own “moment of truth” with God. It may be a single incident or a series of events. We can “hear his voice” many different ways. It can be something that is activated by one of our five senses. It may be something as ordinary as a thought, a word, a conviction, an inspiration, a dream, or as extraordinary as a vision or a revelation.

It can be subtle or spectacular, serene or severe, slow or swift. It may be a pleasant or an unpleasant experience through which God is attempting to get our attention. Maybe it is a humanly unexplained happening - something more than a coincidence.

God customizes his contacts with humans, depending on who the person is. He is reaching out to you and to me individually, in a very personalized manner. And he does it in his own time, at his own pace, in his own way. That being the case, if we do not take these moments seriously, they could come back to haunt us and

even to testify against us. *“Be careful not to refuse to listen to Him who is speaking to you”* (Hebrews 12:25 Weymouth).

God usually uses culturally common methods of communicating with people. For example, in Arabic countries, where Bibles, in general, are scarce, he uses dreams and visions to connect directly with individuals.

In China, seekers of truth (especially the educated) come to Truth through research, study and dialog. In some cultures (Africa, South America) God gets involved via miracles. And, in still other (“Western”) countries it is by the convincing and convicting preaching of the Gospel (Good News) of God’s grace.

Maybe we made some sort of effort to reach out or respond to God. Maybe nothing happened at the time, so we didn’t pursue it. But it is essential to keep an open mind and heart toward God, regardless of the progress we are making in our finding him or his finding us. Since the purpose of connecting with God (from his side) is *relational*, he knows the best conditions under which to reveal himself to us (to whatever extent, in whatever timeframe) or to react to *our* overtures. One thing is certain: he will not jump when we snap our fingers. But *he will respond to an unconditional, sincere search and, certainly, to a desperate cry for help.*

If we are not amenable to the possibility of finally responding to God with a commitment of *devotion, obedience and service*, he may not reveal himself to us significantly. *Why should he?* God is not a time waster. If we are not interested in fulfilling his most important expectation of us – *to love and serve him sincerely and profoundly with our entire being* – we shouldn’t expect our association with him to blossom or even to germinate.

***“The LORD doesn’t make decisions the way you do!
People judge by outward appearance,
but the LORD looks at a person’s thoughts and intentions.”***
(1 Samuel 16:7 NLT).

In spite of everything that has been said and written throughout human history, there is no proof that God does not exist. Conversely, there is solid and weighty evidence that he *does* exist. However, belief in the evidence is not enough. We must go beyond indispensability of *belief* and abundance of *evidence*; we need to appreciate their divinely-intended *purpose*. As for proof, God *does* make himself known, especially to those who are open to having an ongoing personal relationship with him.

If I insist on and persist in living by moral relativism and situational ethics (translation: I live as I please and answer to myself) then, obviously, God is not for me. But, if I am yearning for him and his kind of standards, I am well on my way of encountering him. Nothing and no one in this world will truly, fully and permanently gratify me. Only my Creator can adequately satisfy me. How do I know I won’t enjoy him, if I have never experienced, “tasted” how good he is? *“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man [person] who trusts in him!”* (Psalm 34:8 AV).

So, it all comes down to this: *“... without [apart from] faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him [to start living for him] must believe that he exists and that he rewards [responds bigheartedly to] those who earnestly seek him”* (Hebrews 11:6. Emphasis added). Throughout this treatise, I will be citing quite a few biblical references. After all, God speaks for himself much better than anyone else can.

Many years ago, I had a brilliant language teacher who was a professing agnostic. Sonia doubted God's existence simply because he did not meet her personal expectations. Her litmus test? "If there is a God, he would have destroyed my terrible neighbor by now. How can he exist when my awful neighbor still exists? However, if he does exist, he is powerless, or unjust and indifferent."

But Sonia *could* believe in a god who would meet her specific requirements of character and conduct. And she wanted to deal with a god of her own criteria and on her own terms. Of course, she wanted a god she could freely manipulate. She thought of God as a genie she could command and control.

Ask any ten people to depict God, and you will get ten different descriptions. For example, one would be a god of unqualified love and unlimited tolerance; another would be stern and unforgiving. In every case, it would be a god each one of us would create (to some extent) as a reflection of ourselves.

Can you imagine a world with a God who would try to please every individual? I say *try*, because it would be ridiculous (and wrong) for him to try to gratify my selfish whims and wishes – even if I lived in complete isolation from other human beings. If he did try to please every member of an interrelating society, it would lead to instant and total chaos. A God worthy of his name and position would never allow himself to get into such a situation.

Actually, the true God does know what it takes to truly satisfy each one of us, and he has the solution. It has to do more with our pleasing him – theocentricity -- than with his pleasing us. God put us together in such a way that we are truly happy, satisfied and fulfilled only when we are endeavoring to please our Creator. In "*The Hound of Heaven*," poet Francis Thompson (1859-1907) found that he was fleeing from the very one he was seeking. Sadly, even when we believe in God, all too often we think we understand ourselves and know what's best for ourselves, better than he does.

I did tell Sonia that, according to his own words, found in the Bible, God has an immutable identity. He also has his own sovereign, predetermined, long-term plan and purpose for humanity. Conditional belief ("I would believe in God if...") is nothing more than mentally creating him to my own liking, in compliance with my personal specifications. That kind of god does exist but, fortunately, only in my imagination. I think the following quote speaks for a lot of people: "The kind of God I'm most willing to believe in hasn't yet been invented."

"You thought I [God] was altogether like you..." (Psalm 50:21).

Sonia couldn't get past her horrible next-door neighbor. Tragically, she allowed the behavior of one ordinary human being to determine whether or not she would acknowledge God and pursue a relationship with him. She wanted to squeeze God into her tiny, handmade, cardboard box, when, in reality, the universe cannot contain him.

God either exists or he doesn't exist (1) whether or not we believe in him, (2) no matter what we think of him and (3) regardless of how people behave toward each other or toward him.

Man's free will and God's preemptive privilege

I live in the USA, in the State of Colorado, where we have a town named Paradise. However, ours is not the only state with a Paradise. All 50 states have a place called Paradise. I think a large number of people would like to live in a trouble-free environment – *here and now*. But what would make it paradise - the place or the people, the real estate or the relationships? We misguidedly concentrate on creating unspoiled *surroundings*, when our problem is within us. We want to make this “a better world,” but the world will be no better than the people (particularly the leaders) who live in it.

**"Every normal man must be tempted at times
to spit upon his hands, hoist the black flag,
and begin slitting throats."**

- Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956)

What can be done with our inherent human evil nature that can quickly transform an idyllic valley into a bloody battlefield? What can we do with the dark side of our human nature? Can we close our eyes to our own conflicting personality traits? Can we rid ourselves of our nagging worries and of our deep-rooted two-facedness? Socrates said: “In all of us, even in good men, there is a lawless wild-beast nature, which peers out in sleep.”

And Nobel laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn observes: “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

Originally, we were created to live in Paradise. (See Genesis 2:8.) The time will come when a certain category of people will enjoy care-free, fear-free, pain-free wholeness and the undisputed but welcome benevolent sovereignty of God. For now, however, according to God's agenda, *this is the way it has to be*.

In spite of everything, even under today's terrible conditions, there are disasters and tragedies that are supernaturally averted or minimized. I have experienced many of them. And you probably have, too. In other words, things could have been a lot worse, if it had not been for God's direct involvement -- overt or covert. These occasions are interpreted by humans as anything from normal to miraculous.

Generally speaking, God will not stop us from living our lives as we please. *But he does reserve the right to limit, control and even preempt our actions whenever and however he chooses.* (See James 4:13-16.) He permitted Joseph's jealous brothers to sell him into Egyptian slavery (See Genesis 37:28); but by the time the predicted seven-year famine came Joseph was in a position to save the lives of all the Egyptians and also the lives of those same brothers. Joseph then told them, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives*” (Genesis 50:20).

For better or for worse, we humans are not automatons; nor does God subjugate us against our will. We have been given the ability to choose, to decide, to act *and* to enjoy or suffer the consequences of our beliefs, our philosophy of life and of our conduct. (See Genesis 2:15-17.) This includes people like skeptical Sonia *and* her nasty neighbor. But, don't forget for a moment that the other side of the free-will coin is *present responsibility and future accountability* to our Creator.

Phase One

Many people are not aware that the current divinely-designated ruler of our small planet is not God but Satan (literally, *adversary*). He is *Prince* of this world but not King or Sovereign. The same Bible that tells us about God also tells us about Satan. He is the former Lucifer (*Morning Star*), a top ranking angel-turned-renegade. (See John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). *He, too, acts with God's permission.* (See Luke 22:31.) "...*this is your moment, the time when the power of darkness reigns*" (Luke 22:53 NLT).

The high-flying word, "*angel*," simply means *messenger, agent, deputy, representative* -- a made-to-order, usually invisible being, fashioned by God to serve him somehow, somewhere in the universe. Unlike humans, angels are *not* created in God's likeness; nor can they be redeemed and reclaimed once they've gone wrong. Satan received power over people when our first parents (Adam and Eve) chose to believe him rather than God. Morally, this had a negative domino effect on all humanity. Consequently, most people ignore or are opposed to God's rule and rules – even when they do acknowledge his existence and give him lip service. (See Acts 26:18.)

- We question God, but we don't want him to examine us.
- We think we can give him orders, but we aren't interested in obeying him.
- We expect God to wait on us, but we don't want to serve him.
- We want to control God; whereas, he should be controlling us.
- We'd like to change him, but we will not allow him to change us.

For the time being, God says he patiently and purposely permits all of this. And for this he has his own supra-human reasons. There are things that must first come to pass. This takes time. *God's time.* "*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day*" (2 Peter 3:8).

God does not need to prove anything to himself. However, he does feel obligated to prove some important things about himself and about his created beings. He wants to do this for the benefit of the supernatural spirit world and for us mere mortals. And for all this he has his own timetable. But the day is coming when, in so many words, he will say both to the forces of evil and to humans: "Your time is up! I gave you freedom to do it your way. And look at what you've done! From now on, we'll do it my way." (See Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 11:15.) And the words of what we call "The Lord's Prayer" will finally come to pass: "...*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (See Matthew 6:10).

For now, it's best to give God the benefit of the doubt as to what he does or doesn't do about human affairs. In any case, our disregarding or our distrusting him will affect neither the nature nor the degree of his involvement, his plans and his timetable.

**"Men and nations behave wisely once they
have exhausted all the other alternatives."
- Abba Eban (1915-2002).**

During this present period, the Lord is recruiting individuals whose orientation is around *him*, rather than around themselves. (See Mark 8:34-38; 2 Corinthians 5:15.)

Phase Two

According to God's plan, these same but totally transformed recruits (See Hebrews 12:23) will help govern the future new world where everything will be good, and right, and safe. No more tears, no more death, no more mourning. (See Revelation 21:3-4.) There will be total justice and never-ending peace. (See Isaiah 11:1-9)

God's people "... *will judge the world...*" (I Corinthians 6:2).

"To him...I will give authority over the nations" (Revelation 2:26).

"*You have made them [the redeemed people] to be a kingdom...and they will reign on the earth*" (Revelation 5:10).

The Lord's followers "...*will reign [with him] for ever and ever*" (Revelation 22:5). (cf Isaiah 61:11; Daniel 7:18,22,27; Romans 8:19.)

"...the glory of the Lord will be revealed..."

(Selections from the 40th chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah, 712 BC)

In the desert prepare the way for the Lord;
make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all mankind together will see it.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

All men are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.
The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God stands forever.

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.
He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales

and the hills in a balance?
 Who has understood the mind of the Lord,
 or instructed him as his counselor?
 Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him,
 and who taught him the right way?
 Who was it that taught him knowledge
 or showed him the path of understanding?

Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
 they are regarded as dust on the scales;
 he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.
 Before him all the nations are as nothing;
 they are regarded by him as worthless
 and less than nothing.

To whom, then, will you compare God?
 What image will you compare him to?
 As for an idol, a craftsman casts it,
 and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
 and fashions silver chains for it.
 A man too poor to present such an offering
 selects wood that will not rot.
 He looks for a skilled craftsman
 to set up an idol that will not topple.

Do you not know?
 Have you not heard?
 Has it not been told you from the beginning?
 Have you not understood since the earth was founded?
 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
 and its people are like grasshoppers.
 He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
 and spreads them out like a tent to live in.
 He brings princes to naught
 and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
 No sooner are they planted,
 no sooner are they sown,
 no sooner do they take root in the ground,
 than he blows on them and they wither,
 and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

To whom will you compare me?
 Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:
 Who created all these?
 He who brings out the starry host one by one,
 and calls them each by name.
 Because of his great power and mighty strength,
 not one of them is missing.

Do you not know?
 Have you not heard?
 The Lord is the everlasting God,
 the Creator of the ends of the earth.
 He will not grow tired or weary,
 and his understanding no one can fathom.

"The graveyards are full of indispensable men."

- Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970).

Verifying God's Existence

Needlessly and regrettably, many of us are tempted to doubt the goodness (if not the existence) of God, just because so much is wrong either with our personal lives or with the world. But, let's not make the mistake of doubting his integrity or his existence only because we don't approve of his personality, plans, policies and practices. When we accuse God of wrongdoing, be it for his actions or for his inaction, we are more than mistaken; *we actually offend him*. (See Job 1:22.)

You might be saying you doubt God's existence because there is no *proof*. It is doubtful I can provide you with proof that God lives; that is, proof you would readily, if not eagerly accept. But, equally, it cannot be proven that he *isn't* real. It seems to me that you and I have only one option: we can *believe* -- believe whatever we want, because all of us are believers. We can believe he does or doesn't exist. And I believe we should tolerate if not respect each other's beliefs, even though we may disagree.

I think belief and proof are not mutually exclusive. Speaking for myself, I can say my belief is not a substitute for proof. Adam and Eve had proof of God's existence, but proof was not enough. They also needed to believe in God enough to trust and obey him. To have faith in God is to trust him; to trust God is to live for him unconditionally.

I am a believer because I'm convinced faith is an inseparable, indispensable, irreplaceable part of approaching and interacting with God – proof or no proof. We may think that if we had proof, faith would be superfluous. I don't think so. Proof of God's existence comes equipped with faith. There is no such thing as faithless proof of the existence of God.

In the early 1950s, my wife, Betty, and I lived in Marseille, France. We once entertained a student from the University of Paris. Before long, our conversation turned to spiritual things. It soon became clear that our young guest recognized neither God nor the hereafter. That is what his university professors taught him.

"How do we know there is life after death? Has anyone ever returned from there to tell us about it?" he argued.

"Let's say there would be a knock on our door," I answered. "The man standing there would tell us there *is* life after death, because he had been there and was sent to make us aware of the fact. Would you believe him?"

Without a moment's hesitation, the young philosophy student replied, "Yes, I would!"

"I wouldn't," was my response.

Somewhat chagrined, our friend added, "I guess I wouldn't, either."

Abraham, the Old Testament patriarch, told a formerly rich and influential man that if people on earth do not believe what God says in the Bible about life after death, "...*they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead*" (Luke 16:31).

If someone offered *you* proof of God's existence, how would you react to it? Would you accept it? If yes, why? If no, why not? Wouldn't it depend on whether or not you trusted, *believed* both the person and the "proof"? And that's not all: I can be presented with valid proof and still choose to ignore, deny or reject it. For example, there are people who choose to believe the Holocaust never happened.

What if God himself appeared to you in some way. Would you *believe* it was actually he? And, if you did *believe* it was he, what difference would it make? Would you respond to him, interact with him? How? Positively? Negatively? Would you curse him or would you bless him? Would you love him or would you hate him? Would you argue with him, criticize him and rebel against him; or would you be eager to understand him, cooperate with him and please him?

The exclusivity of faith

Because of humanity's defective spiritual and moral condition, a *faith approach* to God is much more suitable than a *proof formula*. In fact, if we want to connect with God, the only workable option he has given us, for our times, is "*by faith*." There are no valid, acceptable alternatives. The path of proof is nonexistent. Insisting on proof is like beating a dead horse: it wastes your time and energy and gets you nowhere. If you choose not to believe in God you will never get to know him, because belief is the only door there is to discovering him. Plus, *your disbelief will blind you from seeing the evidence of God's existence within you and around you*.

Proof may belong in the laboratory, but that's not true of spiritual things. Why? Because God is not amoral; he cannot be scrutinized simply scientifically. And, anyway, if proof were a viable way of discovering God, it would create a whole new set of complications and difficulties. In most cases it would be unbearably confrontational and predictably counterproductive. It would back us into a corner, force us into an inflexible situation, make us feel awkward and uncomfortable. It would put us on the defensive, make us think, say and do unpredictable, irrational things. We don't know what we are asking for because, in reality, most of us would resent the very proof we say we want. And, God knows all this only too well. That's why, in our era, he doesn't base his relationship with us on problematic proof. He has bigger, better ideas and solutions.

God made us free moral agents. He gives us a choice, a way out – if that's what we want. (And, sadly, many do.) He proposes, not imposes. He doesn't want to overwhelm or frighten us with his awesomeness; instead, he prefers to draw us to himself with his astonishing love, with his wonderful grace and his marvelous mercy.

Besides, there would be something potentially stifling and terminal about clinical proof. The discovery process, the anticipation, the surprise element and the adventure would be short-lived. From indeterminable START to nonexistent FINISH, *there is something incomparable, unsurpassable and interminable about getting to know God*. Our delightful, thrilling association with him will continue to develop into and throughout eternity. He will never cease to fascinate us. He will always fill our hearts with wonder. He is the living and life-giving sovereign of the universe -- not some kind of humanly contrived and controlled phenomenon, which we would soon take for granted, get tired of and begin to look for something else.

God is a romantic; he is an old-fashioned suitor. He courts us. He wishes to woo and to win us. He compares himself to a bridegroom. He wants to groom us - his bride. He does this individually, personally and creatively. He wants an ongoing love relationship with us, not just an ineffectual one-time or intermittent intellectual encounter.

In the Bible, a relationship with God is also referred to as a “way” (a road, a journey). Spiritual redemption and rehabilitation is not limited to a single static event; it’s a continuous process called “...*the way of salvation*” (Acts 16:17, AV). It’s also called simply “*The Way*” (Acts 19:9). It is “*the straight [right, AV] way*” (2 Peter 2:15). In fact, Jesus calls *himself* “*the way*” (John 14:6). It’s also a journey because, before we graduate to another sphere in our existence, before we get transferred to another location (for example, to heaven or to another planet), God must test us along the way. In a way, life on Earth is a proving ground. We need to be “road tested” in preparation for the next phase of our being.

What’s more, God bases his dealing with us upon his “foreknowledge” of our individual fundamental disposition, our attitudes, motives, values and actions. (1 Peter 1:2.) He has the ability (program?) to foresee our decisions and choices and where they would ultimately lead. He knows in which direction the tree will eventually fall. So, he can precisely predict the outcome of our lives and of our destiny – for better or for worse. (See Luke 10:13.)

For some reason, God is reticent to reveal himself visually to us. Is it something about him or something about us? Maybe both? His holiness and our sinfulness? In any case, don’t expect even a disguised physical sighting of God, unless, in his opinion, there’s a justifiable need or reason for it. He has chosen other ways of proving himself to you.

A vibrant faith involves our hearts, not just our heads. Heartless, faithless, rigid proof tends to evoke or promote a misguided, inappropriate and even negative response toward God. But, as *living faith* proceeds on its ever-widening, ever-deepening course, it does the opposite. *The process of faith prepares us properly for finally finding God.* Only faith is capable of nurturing what God wants most from us: trust, obedience and devotion – *not forced, but voluntary.* He loves us with a love that is out of this world, and he anticipates absolute commitment from us. He trusts us and he dares us to trust him. He takes risks with us and he expects us to take risks with him. He encourages us to have a childlike attitude toward him – our loving Father in heaven. Typically, a young child is innocent, open-minded, non-judgmental, honest, frank, guileless, trusting. In other words, we can only see God with the eyes of a child; we can only appreciate God with the mind and heart of a child. “*I [Jesus] tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3).

So, faith is not negative; it’s positive. It’s not weakness; it’s strength. It’s not a detriment; it’s an advantage. It’s not the problem; it’s the solution. Proof alone (if it existed) would be deficient, defective and dysfunctional. Living faith is sound and solid. Faith gently takes us by the hand and graciously leads us toward God.

God is not at all concerned about simply proving his existence to you -- if that’s where it would end. He is not interested in your believing in him, if it goes no further. Finding proof of God’s existence means nothing; he wants you to find *him*. No-nonsense faith is not for those who wish to avoid encountering and connecting with God; it is for those who are intrigued with the prospect and privilege of meeting him, bonding with him and developing a never-ending relationship with him. As strange as it may seem, while we cannot prove God’s existence *openly, visibly, publicly*, we can experience him *inwardly, individually*. Although God does not grant conclusive *popular* proof (but only evidence), he does provide compelling *personal* proof. This simply underlines the fact that, today, God is not revealing himself – in person -- to the general public; his concentration is on the individual.

Faith helps you to gladly and widely open your heart's door to God; the demand for proof locks God out of your intellectual entryway with a deadbolt. *By itself*, proof could contribute nothing constructive or productive to the divinely-desired friendly relationship with you. In fact, if you insist on proof first, you are putting the cart before the horse. God insists on the process and results of faith. So, why not start thinking *Belief, Faith, Trust?* They are your true friends. They are capable, experienced door openers. These beautiful triplets will definitely introduce you to God.

Evidence may be indispensable in bringing God and you together. But even impressive evidence, to be useful, requires a positive response. How interested, how resolute, how eager are you to connect with God, to have a close friendship with him? Are you willing to set aside presuppositions and look openly at the evidence?

"God did this [put people on earth] so that men [humans] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). Our disposition toward God is more of a problem than our distance from him.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

So, it is mutual seeking: God seeks us (See Luke 19:10) and we seek him. From his side, God is actively doing everything he needs to do.

Jesus: fact or fiction?

It is interesting to note that more than 300 specific Old Testament predictions about the promised Messiah were all fulfilled in the coming and the work of Jesus Christ.

There is more reason to believe Jesus Christ lived on earth than that Shakespeare or Napoleon were real people. The existence of Jesus Christ is a historical actuality. The superabundance of documented evidence is as close as the Bible, your local library and the Internet. To begin with, if you are a Jew, you can read the Gospel of Matthew, if you are a Gentile, you can start with the Gospel of John. If you read carefully and objectively, you will detect a ring of truth, of authenticity. Here again, you are free to accept or disregard the recorded evidence.

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me – that Christ died for our sins, just as the [Old Testament] Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the [OT] Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now [59 A.D.]. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, I [Apostle Paul] saw him, too, long after the others..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NLT). So, what should we do with fulfilled OT prophecy and with well over 500 mature eye-witnesses?

Jesus' Christ's life, death and resurrection predicted

Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

8 *"He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*

14 *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.*

15 *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*

16 *Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*

17 *I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.*

18 *They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him -- those who cannot keep themselves alive.

30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

31 They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn-- for he has done it.

Beneficial belief in God includes accepting a flesh-and-blood Jesus.

"And the Word [Christ] became flesh and lived awhile in our midst..." (John 1:14. Weymouth).

Jesus told his followers: *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9).

Apostle Paul says that Christ *"...is the image of the invisible God"* (Colossians 1:15).

"The Son [Christ] is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Hebrews 1:3).

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form..." (Colossians 2:9).

"...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:19. Emphasis added.)

"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace...on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel" (Colossians 1:19-23. Emphasis added).

So, yes, 2000 years ago, God *did* appear to us in visible, physical form. Unfortunately, we wouldn't embrace his viewpoint of life. We couldn't tolerate his teaching. We didn't accept his truth. We rejected him. (See Isaiah 53:3; 1 Peter 2:4) We got rid of him. Or so we thought. The resurrected Christ said to doubting Thomas, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed [Thomas chose to believe what he saw.]; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed [that I am Lord and God]"* (John 20:29).

Apostle Peter writes about such believing people. *"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you have not seen him now, you believe in him and are filled*

with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Endorse Jesus Christ, and the question of God is settled automatically. Jesus is equal to God, equally recognized, equally honored. If I don't acknowledge Jesus, neither do I acknowledge the true God.

“Who, [Jesus Christ] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11).

“He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:23). (Notice how graciously God uses human analogies to characterize his close relationship to Christ.)

“As you come to him, [Christ] the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him... For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message...” (1 Peter 2:4,6-8).

The preferred way to believe in God is through Christ. *“Through him [Christ] you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God”* (1 Peter 1:21). How much better to put our faith and hope in God the Son (Christ) and in God the Father, than in our finite selves!

There are people for whom it is difficult to believe that God resurrected Jesus Christ after he was put to death on the cross. But if God can make something out of nothing (he can and he did), he can raise the dead. *“And God will raise our bodies from the dead by his marvelous power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead”* (1 Corinthians 6:14 NLT). Everyone will be resurrected. (See John 5:28,29; 1 Corinthians 15:42.)

Jesus said: *“I lay down my life to receive it back again”* (John 10:17).

Jesus says of himself, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* (John 11:25-26).

What seems miraculous or impossible to us is possible and normal for God. It's natural for him to be supernatural. Why is it OK when humans perform “miracles,” but it's not OK when God performs them? Aren't humans doing today what was thought impossible 25 - 50 years ago? Then, what's the point of limiting God? And I, for one, specifically want a God who can do anything.

**“There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.**

The other is as though everything is a miracle."

- Albert Einstein (1879-1955).

(Isaiah 53. Written 700 B.C.)

Who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
And who can speak of his descendants?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

“What shall I do with Jesus?”

Personally, I think God-the-Son's coming to live among us in human form was a great idea. Less intimidating, less overwhelming. More on our level. More acceptable. Much easier to relate to. The creator, owner and sovereign of the universe took on a human form and even became the serving savior of humanity. (See Philippians 2:5-11.)

It is no surprise that the coming to earth of divinity in the form of humanity is often relegated to the sphere of mythology. However, we should not be in a hurry to do this in the case of Christ's incarnation. I believe it was God's intention to use a communication vehicle with which the people of those times were familiar and could understand. But it goes deeper than the sentimental and psychosomatic implications (to us) of a celestial person born in a barn (of all places!) rather than in a palace; it has fundamental theological consequences. Our salvation is at stake in the virgin birth, historic life, literal death and actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps you say you take the Bible seriously but not literally. However, essentially, the basis of the Gospel is not fictional or even allegorical.

“For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming again. We have seen his majestic splendor with our own eyes. And he received honor and glory from God the Father when God's glorious, majestic voice called down from heaven, ‘This is my beloved Son; I am fully pleased with him.’ We ourselves heard the voice when we were there with him on the holy mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18 NLT).

Some people want nothing to do with Jesus; they want to deal directly and only with God. Others, on the contrary, are interested only in Jesus. But, it's not either/or; it's both. You can't have one without the other. You can't separate them. *“He who hates me hates my*

Father as well" (John 15:23). "No one who denies the Son has the Father. The person who acknowledges the Son also has the Father" (1 John 2:23 CEV). "...anyone who welcomes me [Jesus Christ] welcomes my Father who sent me" (Mark 9:37 NLT). On the Mount of Transfiguration, three of Jesus' apostles heard God say: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (Gospel of Luke 9:35).

It's impossible to understand God correctly without Jesus Christ, and vice versa. In fact, when you deal with "God," (Hebrew: *Elohim*) you deal with The Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is one God in three persons – a complex concept, impossible for us humans to fully comprehend. We do know that these three-in-one Persons vouch for each other. (See John 5:31-37.) Until we receive more divine enlightenment on this intriguing subject, this is just something else we accept by faith and with anticipation. In the meantime, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God..." (Deuteronomy 29:29). "Now I know in part; then [in the next life] I shall know fully..." (1 Corinthians 13:12).

If I say Jesus is a world-class teacher and a globally renowned philosopher, and nothing more, I am ignoring extremely serious and significant things he said about himself and who he claimed to be. For example, *he declared that he was God!* (See John 5:18; 12:44; 14:9-11.) Will I accept him at face value or will I benevolently and condescendingly dismiss him as a pious exaggerator? *Is he or is he not credible? Is he or is he not The Absolute Way, The True Truth and The Source of Life?* Yes, of course, Jesus did teach and impart wisdom. But those activities were not his central thrust, not his consuming passion. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (1 Timothy 1:15).

At this point, the only thing that matters to God is that I ask myself, in the words of the first century Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, with Jesus standing before him: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ [Messiah]?" (Matthew 27:22). At the end of the day, I am still left with the crucial question of what I, personally, will do with Jesus Christ. Isn't it ironic that so many people avoid or evade the very one they need most? Referring to himself, Albert Einstein said: "It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so lonely." Unfortunately, he did not know that Jesus Christ can fill the void we all feel without him. He intentionally made us that way. He is the true and only "Missing Link." He is the only one who can successfully reconcile and reunify us with God the Father.

There are good and there are bad earthly fathers. Unlike human fathers, God is innately good. Even the best of human fathers make mistakes and are sometimes wrong. Our heavenly Father is never wrong in what he does or doesn't do. We are free to disagree with him, but he is always right.

"In all that has happened to us, you [God] have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (Nehemiah 9:33).

"...that you [God] may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge" (Psalm 51:4).

"[God] judges each man's work impartially" (1 Peter 1:17).

"Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).

"...God...is the judge of all people..." (Hebrews 12:23 GNT).

"...yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:7).

God questions Job

(The Book of Job: selected verses from chapters 38-41, written 1500 BC.)

**Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Who marked off its dimensions?
Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid
its cornerstone?**

**Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the
clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its
doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where
your proud waves halt'?**

**What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?
Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings?**

**What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east
winds are scattered over the earth?**

**Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth
the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? Do you know the laws
of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?**

Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?

**The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers
of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful
that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young
harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not
endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her
feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.**

**Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him
leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting? He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his
strength, and charges into the fray. He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy
away from the sword. The quiver rattles against his side, along with the flashing spear and
lance. In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground; he cannot stand still when the trumpet
sounds. At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!' He catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.**

**Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south?
Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?**

**Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer
him! Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?**

**Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay?
Everything under heaven belongs to me.**

Hypocrites

Let's keep in mind that all of us are in serious trouble with God. We have broken his moral laws. Not one of us keeps God's law. (See John 7:19.) We have not given him the recognition, the praise and the glory he deserves and expects. Do we want to deal directly with God without our "court-appointed defense attorney" – the Lord Jesus Christ?

Remember, Jesus is on our side; he is *for* us, not *against* us; he will plead and win our case. Without him, we definitely will lose – catastrophically. We *need* Jesus Christ. He's the only one who can help us in this situation, in this relationship. He can be our savior, our mediator and our best friend.

By the way, Jesus said we cannot be neutral about him. If we are not actively *for* him, we are automatically *against* him. (See Luke 11:23.)

Are we rejecting Christ because “a lot of Christians are hypocrites”? Well, are all businessmen honest? Are all lawyers honorable? Are all doctors truthful? Are all scientists straightforward? Are all policemen law-abiding? Are all politicians respectable? Of course not! Nonetheless, their profession is still a noble one. Certainly, there is an abundance of counterfeit Christians, and Jesus Christ clearly predicted this would happen. (See Matthew 13:25,31) But bad Christians don't make Christ bad. So, *don't judge Jesus by his followers*. And let's be honest - every last one of us is a born hypocrite. What's more, we will answer to God only for ourselves – not for anyone else.

By the way, there is something worse than being a hypocrite and that is not admitting I am one. God says the human heart is drastically deceptive. (See Jeremiah 17:9.) It certainly deceives itself; it sometimes deceives others; it even tries to deceive God. *There is no cure for this condition*. Albert Einstein said: "It is easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man."

Even after we are implanted with God's divine nature, we are not rid of “the enemy within” -- our sinful nature -- until the next life. One of the reasons we should take the biblical God seriously is that only his plan of salvation satisfactorily and permanently resolves the problem of sin. None of the manmade religions of the world can do this.

You may have additional reasons for rejecting Christ, other than the “hypocrite” issue. (Did you know that, throughout the world, regardless of country or culture, people come up with *identical* excuses and pretexts for rejecting either God and/or Christ?) Whether your justifications and arguments are few or many, be aware that none of them will survive when you stand before the Lord. However, if your concerns and questions are legitimate, God will resolve them for you in his own time. For now, try to trust him. My personal experience with him is that he is gracious, generous and incredibly credible. He is totally trustworthy; he is the most trustworthy being in the entire universe.

The unsuitability of proof

The value of the necessity of *proof* of God's existence is overstated; whereas the indispensability of *faith* should be emphasized. Even if humans were perfect in character and had total knowledge, proof would still not be the most important factor in identifying God. If God is the creator and we are his creatures, then proof is not enough. It is faith, trust and commitment that are foundational. God operates in dimensions far, far beyond human experience or comprehension. Stated simply and scripturally, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*" declares the Lord. *'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'*" (Isaiah 55:8,9).

"Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor?" (Romans 11:33-34 NLT).

Consequently, the superior way in which God thinks and acts can often strike earthlings as being paradoxical. ("A paradox is truth standing on its head to attract attention." - Nicholas Falletta.) God's logic is not our logic. His depository of knowledge simultaneously, flawlessly and completely encompasses all of the past, present and future. There is just too much disparity between God and man for proof to play an opening and leading role in our encounter with him. That is not the way he operates. Some sort of proof may come into the picture at some point, even in our present earthly relationship with God; but, by then, it (proof) will not be as important as we may have thought it was – at least not in the form we initially perceived it.

Last week, my wife looked out of our kitchen window to watch the finches help themselves to the birdseed in the feeder. Instead of pleasure, she experienced disappointment. The birds were fighting over which one of them would feast at the bountiful dispenser!

"If I could speak the finch language," she said, "I would go out there and scold them for being so selfish, so impatient. I would teach them to share."

Let's suppose Betty could become a finch and could address all the finches of the world. Would they change their attitude and behavior? Not likely – *unless* they experienced a spiritual heart transplant, unless they received Betty's good nature.

Proof alone could not change my world view and certainly not my basic, noncompliant (toward God) human nature. Proof could not give me a new heart. I would still need a spiritual rebirth, transformation -- if I wanted loving, trusting, endless fellowship with my Maker. That is something only God's Spirit can do within me. That, by the way, is his earthly assignment; but I have to be open to his input. Jesus told Nicodemus that God's Spirit is like the wind. "*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit*" (John 3:8). To the "*born again*" person, being "*born of the Spirit*" is proof enough.

By itself, purely scientific proof would not repair my strained relationship with my Creator. Proof couldn't harmonize me with God. Only Christ can correctly connect and conform me to him. I would still need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be reconciled with God and to live with him *eternally*. (See Acts 16:31.) What is the point of believing in God if there is nothing beyond this earthly life? "*... if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world*" (1 Corinthians 15:19 NLT). "*He has ...set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they [humans] cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Since God is eternal, it is only right that we (who are made in his likeness) should also be eternal.

Compared with eternity, all of human history is only a split second. Are the short-lived, self-centered pursuits and pleasures of this world worth forfeiting everlasting pleasures? Let's not be like Esau, who sold his legacy for the immediate pleasure of a bowl of hot lentil stew. That's how much he thought about his future. The Bible says that he scorned his birthright. (See Genesis 25:29-34.) And even if we momentarily do suffer here for following Christ, what is that compared with the glorious enjoyment we will experience in the endless next life? (See Romans 8:18; Hebrews 11:24-27.)

Apostle Paul tells the believers in Ephesus that they were *spiritually dead* when they were without Christ. "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of [Satan] the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us*

lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us [spiritually] alive with Christ..." (Ephesians 2:1-5).

"The righteousness of God"

Let's say you insist on calling yourself an agnostic or an atheist. Could it be that your principal problem is not God's *existence* but his *perfection*? We may accuse him of being unfair and unjust but, at the same time, we may fear or resent his honesty and holiness. So, which do we want: a flawed God or a faultless one? Would we take seriously a God who is morally deficient -- like the ancient gods of Greek and Roman mythology? Yes, we would certainly be more accepting of him, but he wouldn't be able to resolve our pressing problems anymore than could the real or fictitious super heroes of the past or present.

Reformation leader Martin Luther (1483-1546), was intimidated by "the righteousness of God," until it dawned on him that God's justness was not a threat but, on the contrary, the means by which he (God) could offer soul salvation to people - not through our defective and deficient *human* righteousness but through his *divine* righteousness.

"Since they [the Israelites of the Old Testament] did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end [completion] of the law [of Moses and, for that matter, the laws of any other religion] so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:3-4).

In the person of Christ, God took on our humanity, so that we could take on his divinity. Isn't that a much better solution? But, until we experience a supernatural, purifying rebirth, we will naturally feel troubled in God's presence. (A personal spiritual awakening will not make us incapable of sinning, while we are on earth and in this body, but it will activate God's arrangement and condition for forgiveness and reconciliation. And we will feel comfortable and comforted with his closeness.)

Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they got along very well with him. But immediately after they defied God, they hid from him because they became afraid of him. They knew they would be uncomfortable in his presence. And it was God who had to take the initiative to reestablish contact with them. (See Genesis 3:8.)

Here is what Job finally said to the Lord after he self-righteously argued with God and questioned him: *"I am unworthy...I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer - twice, but I will say no more"* (Job 40:4-5). *"I know that you [Lord] can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:2-3, 5-6).

When the prophet Isaiah found himself in the presence of God, here is how he involuntarily reacted: *"This is awful! I am as good as dead! For I am a man with an unclean heart and live among people who have unclean hearts and my eyes have seen the Sovereign Lord Almighty." Then one of the angels flew over to me. He brought a hot coal, which he took with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my lips, saying: 'There! Your insubordinate spirit is taken away and your sin is cleansed'"* (Isaiah 6:5-7, MOT). Until the prophet saw a partial manifestation of God, he was like most people; he had an attitude of insubordination toward him. After God touched him, Isaiah was a changed man.

And when fisherman-turned-apostle, Simon Peter, first met Jesus Christ, he exclaimed: “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8). That is a normal, honest human reaction to an encounter with a holy, pure God. A close encounter with divine holiness intensifies the awareness of our sinfulness.

God is not the enemy; *we* are. We have been our own worse enemy ever since Adam disobediently ate the forbidden fruit, became spiritually dead and morally degraded. And we have been killing each other ever since Cain killed his brother, Abel.

God is not the problem; *we* are. It starts with our defiled *nature*, continues with our defiant *thinking* and ends with our disobedient *behavior*. God is able to save us from ourselves. Knowing God has nothing to do with *science* but everything to do with *conscience*.

A self-centered, self-indulgent individual is naturally reluctant to admit the existence of a God who requires repentance, humility, godliness and accountability. And, a morally pure God understandably cannot have a positive, productive and progressive relationship with a person whose life -- essentially -- displeases him.

“*The fool* [that is, the morally deficient person] *said in his heart, ‘There is no God’*” (Psalm 53:1). With his *mouth*, a person may say there is no God, but he will not say it with his *heart* – unless he is a “fool” – someone who is seriously spiritually challenged. But, it is safe to say that, in spite of all the brash denials and bold declarations, down deep -- especially in totally helpless, emergency moments -- *everyone* believes in God.

**“Man is certainly stark mad;
He cannot make a worm,
and yet he will be making gods by dozens.”**
- Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592).

Billions of people believe in (if not worship) lifeless, manmade gods. Are you willing to consider aligning yourself with the one and only living God? Although he assures us he is unique and absolute, he does not coerce us, nor does he ask us to believe in him blindly.

Intelligent design

An increasing number of scientists are open to the idea of *intelligent design*. This should not surprise us because, as all of us observe and study nature, we do see intelligent design. And where there is intelligent design, there has to be an intelligent designer.

I have already pointed out that, according to the Bible, the belief in a Creator-God has strong spiritual and moral implications because of who God is and what he is like. Whatever we believe about morality on earth and in space, one thing is evident: in endless books and motion pictures (not only for adults but also for children), we are preoccupied with the ongoing struggle between *good and evil*, not only around us but also within us. *Why?* If we are the highest order in an evolutionary process, *when, how and why* did good and evil appear on the scene? Where, how and why did we get a conscience, our sense of right and wrong, our shame, our guilt feelings? Why is it that only humans blush? On the side of virtue, *when and why* did we become aware of civility, dignity, modesty and integrity? And, on the side of vice, *when, how and why* did cheating, lying, stealing, murder and depravity enter the picture?

Why all the restlessness, unrest? Why is there constant conflict in so many souls, in so many relationships? Why so many enemies, why so much hatred, so much rage? Why wars, terrorism, genocide, repression, tyranny? Why all the aggression and all the destruction? What's wrong with us Homo sapiens? What's going on?

I believe these are only symptoms of something much deeper. We have no *peace* within ourselves; therefore we have no peace with others. *And it's all because we are not at peace with God.* If we don't have a right relationship with him, it affects all other relationships. And until that is resolved, nothing will change. But when it does change, it will change our disposition, our attitude and our inner wellbeing.

So, we need to get right with God. How do we do that? When we make peace with God, we will have peace within ourselves. There can be no peace in individuals, no peace on earth, until we personally and individually receive the "Prince of Peace" – the Lord Jesus Christ – into our hearts and lives.

"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him" (Psalm 62:1).

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Some people find it easier and preferable to believe in an amoral supernatural force or intelligence that has no relationship with them – individual or collective. But, note that this is a baseless personal *belief*. For, if this amoral force *did* exist, how would we know it; how would we prove it – since "it" does not communicate with us? Fortunately for us all, our caring, communicating God tells us that no such indifferent supreme being exists. (See Deuteronomy 4:35.) The God who revealed himself to us is the only one there is. (See 1 Chronicles 17:20; Isaiah 45:5-24; Joel 2:27; 1 Timothy 2:5.) *"I am God, and there is no other"* (Isaiah 46:9).

There are people who do not permit the thought that there is a God because they don't want any competition; they themselves want to play god. Along with people like William Henley, they want to be *captain of their soul and master of their fate*. But even if they do acknowledge God, they would like to contain him, put him under a microscope and study him like a laboratory specimen. Or they would be delighted to harness God's power for their own self-serving purposes. It should be noted that God does not object to being harnessed, as long as you harness yourself with him and pull together with him. (See Matthew 11:28.)

We humans haven't done very well even with the limited responsibilities God has already entrusted to us. We have recklessly exploited and endangered one of his choice, "living" planets, not to mention what we've done to ourselves and to each other. We live unethically and immorally and encourage others to do the same. (See Romans 1:32.) More importantly, we have failed to give God the recognition and devotion (even worship!) he requires. (Instead of glorifying him, we want to glorify ourselves. See Romans 1:21-23.) Why should he trust us with anything more?

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1:26-28). Subdue the earth? Yes! *Subdue God?* We can't even subdue ourselves! But God can subdue us – for our own good -- if we allow him to do so.

Most of us have wondered why planet earth is inhabited, and yet it is so small by comparison. Shouldn't it be much bigger, considering who we are and what we're capable of doing? This is a natural, self-important human point of view. But, from God's perspective, the earth's size serves his current purposes precisely. It is phase one and it is enough for now. The smaller the setting, the less damage we can do. And we're not yet doing all the good we can and should be doing – right here on earth. (If God were in charge, he could do more with less.) We don't need a bigger planet; we just need better management.

We are still proudly building our “towers of Babel” – not only on earth, but now in space. We feel compelled to spend astronomical amounts of money to discover (if not conquer) as much of the universe as possible. True, space science has given us new, especially miniaturized technology we can use in everyday life. But if it's a matter of needing to create more jobs, let's first do it by resolving basic behavioral, material and health problems in our own backyard.

“You put us in charge of everything you made, giving us authority over all things: the sheep and the cattle and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents” (Psalm 8:6-8). God instructed mankind to subdue the earth, not space. For now, that's a big enough assignment and definitely a full-time job. I think we need to reexamine our motives, reconsider our priorities and be more responsible for our home planet.

And, oh yes, what about orbital debris? In 1999 there were already 110,000 objects in earth orbit, weighing a total four million pounds, left behind by us humans. And, by now, the situation is much worse. Currently, debris in low earth orbit is increasing at a rate of 5% per year. And that's not counting 500,000 pieces of space junk. It is relatively simple to collect trash along earth's highways. But, it is much more difficult to gather space junk which is in the path of working satellites and space-based telescopes. Why is it that wherever we go we leave clutter? As for Planet Earth, after we finish trashing it, God will completely renovate it. (See Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1.)

As I said earlier, earthly life is a test of how we will conduct ourselves in relation to God, each other and our environment. Earth is a temporary proving ground for the permanent and larger scale of existence still ahead. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's first clean up our act – spiritually and physically - starting right here, each in his own neighborhood, each in his own space.

A bit about God

In a very real sense, God is transcendent but, even now, we can know him to a certain extent. We can know him enough to bring us into a right and ongoing relationship with him. For the time being, God has shared with us everything we need to know about him.

This is not the place for a sweeping study of the *Person* of God but, I believe, at this juncture, it would be appropriate to mention some of his awesome attributes.

We can know that he is:

- **Unique** (the one and only)

“... *there is one God...*” (I Timothy 2:5).

"...apart from me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

"...so that the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other" (1 Kings 8:60).

"We know that... there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:4,6).

- **Sovereign** (supreme)

"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. 32:39).

"For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27).

"If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" (Job 9:12).

"Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Psalm 115:3).

"Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?" (Job 4:17).

- **Holy** (innately morally pure and righteous, sinless)

"Holy is his name" (Luke 1:49).

"There is no one holy like the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:2).

"As for God, his way is perfect" (Psalm 18:30).

"[God's] works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deut. 32:4)

- **Eternal** (has no beginning and no end)

"The eternal God..." (Deuteronomy 33:27).

"...from everlasting [eternity] to everlasting [eternity] you are God" (Psalm 90:2).

"...his eternal power and divine nature..." (Rom 1:20).

"...the eternal Spirit..." (Heb 9:14).

"Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' 'Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13,14).

I AM means God was, is and will be. For him, time doesn't exist as it does for us. He simultaneously lives in the past, present and future. Life originates in him. If there were no God, there wouldn't be anything else. We "are," only because he "is."

As unfathomable as it may seem to us finite humans, there was never a time when God did not exist. If there is anything harder to believe than that God exists, it's that he has no beginning and no end. But he says he's eternal; so, for the time being, we choose either to believe or disbelieve him. We get our life from God, but he himself is self-existent. "... [God] *the Father has life in himself*" (John 5:26).

Personally, if I were an agnostic or an atheist, I would find it easier to believe in a God who is self- and ever-existent, than to believe in a God who had a beginning somewhere along the way. I have fewer questions about a God who "has life in himself," than about one who got his start and his life from someone or something else. And there is no guarantee that God will be everlasting in the future, unless he is eternal in the past. Taking everything into consideration, I personally find it far easier to believe in the one-and-only, biblical, truth-telling God, than to believe in some other kind of gods or to believe that there is no God at all.

- **Truthful**

"...*it is impossible for God to lie...*" (Hebrews 6:18). (cf Numbers 23:19; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2.)

"...*I am ...truth...*[personified]" (See John 14:6; 1 John 2:21).

- **Loving**

"...*God is love*" (I John 4:8).

"...*for love comes from God*" (I John 4:7).

"*The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...*" (Exodus 34:6).

"...*do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance?*" (Romans 2:4).

"*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him...the Lord has compassion on those who fear him*" (Psalm 103:11,13).

"*For 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*" (John 3:16). You can rightfully make this expression of God's love apply to you personally. "For God loved me so much that he gave his Son for me and if I believe in him I shall not perish but will have eternal life."

God is love personified, so it is no surprise that he loves everything and everyone he created. And he validates his love. But he wants us to reciprocate. That means we will love him more than we love anything or anyone else. Of course, it means we will love him more than we love ourselves. This may surprise you, but God desires to be involved in every detail of our lives. After all, Christianity is not so much a religion as it is a relationship.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth (chapter 13), Apostle Paul writes: *“So these three things continue forever: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love ...Love never ends.”* God’s greatest commandment tells us: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:30). And if *he* needs to give and to receive love, then *we* (created in his likeness) also need to give and receive love. In fact, love is so important in divine and human relationships that *“If I don’t have love, I’m nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). I lovingly encourage you to accept God’s love, love him in return, and *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mark 12:31).

- **Unchanging**

“I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

“...[God] does not change...” (James 1:17).

- **Invisible**

“... [God]...is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27).

“No one has ever seen God...” (John 1:18).

“God is spirit...” (John 4:24).

“... [God] lives in unapproachable [inaccessible] light, whom no one has seen or can see” (1Timothy 6:16). God is likened to perfect, pervading light. His presence encompasses and permeates the universe.

Some people have “seen” God, filtered in a vision or by controlled, limited exposure. For example, an Old Testament prophet writes, *“...I saw the glory of ...God...and I fell facedown”* (Ezekiel 43:2-3). (cf Isaiah 6:1.) God spoke directly to Moses (See Exodus 33:11.), but Moses was not allowed to see God *as he is* (in all his fullness), because, says he, *“...no one can live after seeing me”* (Exodus 33:20. Moffat).

- **Omnipresent** (everywhere at the same time)

“... [God] fills everything everywhere with his presence” (Ephesians 1:23 NLT).

“The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27).

““Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?... Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:24). God fills every cubic centimeter of inner and outer space; he is bigger than the universe he created.

- **Omniscient** (knows absolutely everything)

“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

“...the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9).

"For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths"
(Proverbs 5:21).

"There is nothing concealed [covered up] that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known" (Matthew 10:26).

"He...is perfect in knowledge..." (Job 36:4).

"...his knowledge is infinite" (Psalm 147:5).

"For God...knows everything" (1 John 3:20).

- **Omnipotent** (almighty)

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

"Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you"" (Job 42:1-2, NLT).

"Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17).

"...all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

"...nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

- **Praiseworthy**

"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name..." (Psalm 96:8).

"Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised..." (Psalm 145:3).

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10).

"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth"
(John 4:24).

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever" (1 Timothy 1:17).

God has revealed his character to us. He hates sin but loves the sinner. He is just, and there will come a time when he will justly judge every human that ever lived. (See 2 Timothy 4:1,8.) He will make right all the wrongs. The Lord will punish, will avenge all wrongdoing. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:6). On earth, you may get away with murder. But God saw everything you ever did, and justice will be served in his Supreme Courtroom. Since God is timeless, so are his judgments; there is no statute of limitations in the divine judicial system. There will be no defense, no trial by jury, no Court of Appeals. (See Revelation 20:11-13.) However, although you will be punished appropriately, that is not why you will be sent into eternal outer darkness. You will be separated from God irrevocably because, on earth, you chose not to connect with him through Christ, the divine-human mediator.

We know God's goals on earth. He wants the good news of salvation through Christ to be heard around the world and accepted by "whoever believes." While God the Father

lives in unapproachable light, he is able to implant his Spirit within us, so that we can have an intimate relationship with him. (See 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; 2 Timothy 1:14.) All of his many other attributes can be found on the pages of the Bible. These include the essential characteristic of holy anger (righteous indignation, divine wrath and fury).

The enormity of the evidence

It is not God who is on trial. He has no need to defend and justify himself or to prove his realness in response to the attacks and demands of capricious humans. And, anyway, when is proof, *proof*? Proof of God's existence, after all, would have to be subjective, personalized. It could not be standardized. What is proof to one person isn't proof to another. Some people accept flimsy evidence; others reject solid proof. But while God wisely refuses to supply humanly-perceived proof, he provides evidence that is identical for everyone, because it comes from him, not from humans. So, "moments of truth" are tailor-made to each individual; evidence (internal and external) is general, the same for everybody. And faith easily coexists with evidence. Faith and evidence work well together. They were made for each other. "...*faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*" (Hebrews 11:1).

We do ourselves a big disservice when we unquestioningly "worship" science because, in reality, we are worshipping ourselves. And, tell me: when is science, *science*? When is scientific proof, *scientific*? When is scientific proof, *proof*? And to whom is it proof? Let's not forget that human grasp of science is still very much in its infancy -- compared to God's knowledge and ability.

Not surprisingly, major tenets of humanistic "science" are undergoing endless corrections and adjustments. Two examples: Only in 1998, astrophysicists discovered what they call *Dark Energy*. At the moment, this "energy" is stronger than gravitational pull; therefore, the universe is spreading rather than consolidating. And scientists think *Dark Energy* makes up at least two-thirds of the entire universe. (They call it "*Dark*" because, for now, they have no idea what it is.) And, not long ago, physicist Stephen Hawking refuted his own theory about black holes.

**"If the facts don't fit the theory,
change the facts."
- Albert Einstein**

And, sad to say, *technical* scientists are not the only ones who sometimes use highly imaginative theories to bolster their baseless beliefs. Some ideological academicians do the same thing. Thanks to defective human nature, there is no shortage of philosophical fantasies and "scientific" fabrications in a field that should be respected for its authenticity and honesty. There is no scarcity of pseudo science and counterfeit knowledge in this world. There is an abundance of false and misleading "scientific" research. There is plenty of misconduct (fraud and suppression of truth) in the field of so-called "science." You don't know whom to believe, whom to trust. You just don't know a scientist's reasoning or motivation.

**"What is this thing called Science?
We start off confused and end up
confused on a higher level."
- Alan Chalmers, University of Sydney. AUS**

Anyway, God has given us more than enough evidence to make it possible for us to sensibly and confidently believe in his existence. If we refuse to accept his evidence, we will fall into deeper darkness today and greater condemnation tomorrow.

Even in the absence of any personalized “moment of truth,” we can detect his distinctive design and his persuasive presence *in us and around us*. *We can see his signature everywhere, in everything*. But, if we are driven by our own opposing agenda, we will naturally deny seeing God’s obvious autograph.

"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4).

"The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it" (Psalm 89:11).

"In his [God's] hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10).

"Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3). (cf Job 12.)

"The rich and the poor shake hands as equals—GOD made them both!" (Proverbs 22:2, The Message).

"For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own [Greek] poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17:28).

"God...gives life to everything" (1 Timothy 6:13).

"For the Lord is your life..." (Deuteronomy 30:20).

The testimony of nature

It is easy enough to *declare* that “science” has disproved the existence of God. We are really saying that *man* has disproved the existence of God; but, it comes across so much more authoritative, significant and persuasive to say “science.” Either way, it is impossible to substantiate such a statement. No one should seriously state there is no God, because no one knows everything about the universe – visible and invisible.

I, for one, am still endeavoring to comprehend aspects of supposedly elementary physics such as light, gravity, rotation. But I can safely say there is a God, because the “Made in Heaven” label is authentically and observably woven into all of nature’s fabric.

"... ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:7-10).

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1).

I suspect that, sometimes, a person’s insistence on *proof* of God’s existence is not entirely sincere. Some people would rather *not* be confronted with concrete, irrefutable

proof. Such people just don't want to deal with God, period. But, putting God out of my mind will not put him out of existence. While no "proof" is provided, there is the obvious, undeniable mountain of evidence to deal with. To doubt it, to ignore it, is unreasonable. This unmistakable, plentiful and trustworthy evidence is designed to point me in the direction of God. Whether or not I proceed toward him is mine to decide, mine to choose.

Goodbye, Ladybug!

It is a flawless April morning on the plains of central Saskatchewan, Canada. Definitely a day to be outdoors. I am not old enough to be in school; however, higher education is waiting for me out on the prairie.

I stroll barefooted down our long, dirt driveway. I cross the sandy, rutted road which runs between our two *sections* (a section is a square mile) and I walk deep into the fenced pasture, where our horses and cows graze.

It's only midmorning, but the bright sun is already warmly bathing my exposed face, arms and legs!

Without a second thought, I get down and lie flat on my back. I look around. Between the tall, dark-green grass is a copious, random arrangement of wild flowers in full bloom. What rich, brilliant colors! What unique designs!

Then I look up at the sky! *What...a...sky!* Deep blue infinity. *Awe-inspiring!*

And the *clouds!* Endless shapes and sizes, like colossal clusters of cotton silently floating through an ocean of air – all going in the same easterly direction, all moving at the same leisurely pace. *Mesmerizing!*

I am profoundly impressed. But how could all this exist, how could all this be happening without a powerful intelligence behind it?

My musings are interrupted by a meadowlark which gradually lifts itself vertically from the ground, all the while warbling its matchless melody. Look! It is stopping to hover in midair, as though suspended from a string - still fluttering and still singing. *Captivating!*

As I lay surrounded by the wonders of nature, a tiny bug unexpectedly but ceremoniously lands on my hairless right forearm. After touchdown, it methodically folds its fragile wings and tucks them under its spotted hardtop. It remains motionless, allowing me to study its fascinating form, its marvelous markings and its conspicuous colors. In its own way, it sends me a crisp and clear message: "*Observe and believe.*" Having fulfilled its mission, it deliberately prepares for liftoff.

"Goodbye, Ladybug! Thank you for your visit. Thank you for showing me there is a God." (It's OK. Four-year-olds are allowed to talk to bugs, especially when they are sent on a special assignment by their caring creator to a receptive child.)

This morning, I left our house a dispassionate agnostic. At noon I am going home a devoted *and* very hungry theist.

The testimony of conscience

In addition to the observable evidence of God's power, character and achievements, we also were *born* with a relatively healthy sense of right and wrong. We are not *born* with cauterized consciences; we become desensitized with time. "*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts*" (Ephesians 4:18). (See also Acts 28:27; 1Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15.)

From the cradle to the grave we are tempted, pressured and deceived into believing that purity and honesty are only for the naïve and intellectually challenged. But, you were born with a God-consciousness that faithfully testified about his existence and his moral laws.

"...God made men right, but they have found many sinful ways" (Eccl. 7:29 NLV).

I like philosopher Martin Buber's phrasing of this truth: "The law is not thrust upon man; it rests deep within him..." God put it there. Only you and the Lord know what you did with your inborn, primordial God-awareness. If you had nurtured his presence in you from the beginning, you would not doubt his existence now. You would not be asking for proof; you would already have it.

God's word says that, in the innermost part of their being, even depraved people know when they are doing wrong. *"...they know God's righteous decree that those who do such [evil] things deserve death..."* (Romans 1:32). People will be without excuse because *"...the requirements of the law [of God] are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness [are still speaking up] ..."* (Romans 2:15).

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men [humans] who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

"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 [humans] are without excuse.

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...They exchanged the truth of God for a lie... Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind..." (Romans 1:18-22, 25, 28). (cf Romans 2:4-8.)

What, then, will you believe: your eyes or their lies? Your conscience or your closed mind? You have an open mind to everything else. Why not to God? The Lord says he made you intelligent enough to plainly see his hand in the created things around you.

Did you notice that passive *godlessness* is in the same class with active *wickedness*? Simply leaving God out of our daily lives -- whether or not we believe in him -- is as weighty as wrongdoing. We offend God when we fail to acknowledge him, when we fail to subordinate ourselves to him. God wants you to be involved with him. *"They [ancient Israel] cried out to the Lord and said, 'We have sinned; [because] we have forsaken the Lord..."* (1 Samuel 12:10).

(Also search synderesis: *Scintilla conscientiae*.)

Nothing to be proud of

Obviously, God could easily prove his existence to us, but he has chosen not to do so to today's humanity. He tried it in the past, and it did not have the desired results. The Old Testament is replete with instances where God proved his existence to humans, starting with Adam and Eve, continuing with the nation of Israel and ending with pharaohs and kings. Fortunately, his current "*by faith*" plan produces far superior, satisfying results.

But *pride* interferes with God-cognizance and responsiveness to him. (Arrogance, conceit and vanity are variations of pride.) "*For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting [expressed pride] of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world*" (1 John 2:16). There is an endless parade of unwarranted pride: pride of intellect, pride of achievement, pride of position, pride of power, pride of expertise, pride of wealth, pride of one's social standing, etc., etc..

"*Arrogance and pride—distinguishing marks in the wicked—are just plain sin*" (Proverbs 21:4, (The Message).

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." - Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke 18:10-14.

Recent research done by Baylor University (Waco, Texas) reveals "that humility is a positive quality associated with self-esteem, well-being, and even performance benefits. College students who showed more humble traits got higher grades than those who were arrogant and narcissistic."

Dr. Wade Rowatt, the Baylor professor of psychology who conducted the survey, defines humility "as a psychological quality characterized by being more modest, down-to-earth, and respectful, rather than arrogant, immodest, or egotistical. This conception of humility implies that one acknowledges mistakes, realizes limits, avoids bragging, and is respectful of others."

Pride is inappropriate for humans. God hates pride but loves humility. (See James 4:6.) "*He [God] has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8).

It is fitting that we give God the recognition and the glory for any and all of our successes. "*...I [the Lord] will not yield my glory to another*" (Isaiah 48:11). If we don't pass on the credit and the praise to God whenever we do well or whenever we are praised, the consequences can be severe. (See Acts 12:19-23.)

"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). We are *not* self-sufficient. We are *not* self-endowed. We are *not* self-sustained. God gifts us. God powers us. What we are and have is thanks to *him*.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..." (James 1:17).

"...in him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28, Moffatt). *"...apart from me [the Lord] you can do nothing"* (John 15:5).

"If God were to take back his spirit and withdraw his breath, all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to dust" (Job 34:14-15 NLT).

Don't allow such a detrimental characteristic as pride keep you from coming to God through Christ. Swallow your pride and let humility lead you to living, saving faith. Right now, there is nothing more important than that. It is the bottom line of all bottom lines.

"...let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:24).

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!" (Romans 11:35-36).

Yes, we belong to God – body, soul and spirit; we are not our own. (See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.) Life is not an unconditional gift; life has been entrusted to us. That is why God makes us responsible; that is why he will hold us accountable for how we lived.

The foolishness of God

Are you denying, shunning or keeping your distance from Jesus Christ because he makes you uneasy, uncomfortable? Because he is an enigma, a stigma? You might be interested to know that the element of *offensiveness* was purposely built into God's plan of salvation. I believe *it was designed to expose (1) the pseudo intellectual, (2) the egocentrically proud, (3) the self-righteous and (4) the hypocritically pious*. Even though there may be temporary embarrassment (to our old, sinful nature) associated with openly confessing Christ in society, we should be ashamed of ourselves and not of him. This requires humility and honesty.

Jesus said: *"God blesses those who are not offended by me"* (Luke 7:23, NTL).

If you are one of those people who makes fun of the Bible and jokes about heaven and hell, just remember: *God will have "the last laugh."* (Read Psalm 2.)

Apostle Paul says that God is the source of true knowledge and wisdom. And he shares understanding, knowledge and wisdom with whomever he wishes, especially with those who acknowledge him and glorify him. *"My purpose is that they [Christians] ...may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Colossians 2:2-3).

But, since the use (on the part of God) of conventional reason and wisdom failed to bring us into a right relationship with him, God found it necessary to use humanly-perceived

foolishness to get through to people. Not very sophisticated, *but it works!* It shows to what lengths God went to get our attention, to communicate with us, to demonstrate how much he cares for us.

There is a fascinating account in the Old Testament (2 Kings 5, NLT) about Syria's top military commander (circa 895 BC). Naaman was successful in his career and highly esteemed. But, he suffered from leprosy. On the suggestion of his wife's Hebrew maid, he traveled to the land of Israel to be healed. The maid specifically had the *prophet* of Israel – Elisha - in mind as the person to contact, but Naaman naturally thought he should contact the *king* of Israel. He went armed with a letter of introduction from the king of Syria. He also brought impressive gifts: 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of *haute couture* clothing.

"The letter to the king of Israel stated: 'With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy.' When the king of Israel read it, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, 'This man sends me a leper to heal! Am I God, that I can kill and give life? He is only trying to find an excuse to invade us again.' But when Elisha, the man of God, heard about the king's reaction, he sent this message to him: 'Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel.'

"So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: 'Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of leprosy.' But Naaman became angry and stalked away. 'I thought he would surely come out to meet me!' he said. 'I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the LORD his God and heal me! Aren't the Abana River and Pharpar River of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel put together? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?' So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

"But his officers tried to reason with him and said, 'Sir, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply to go and wash and be cured!' So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his flesh became as healthy as a young child's, and he was healed!

"Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, 'I know at last that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Now please accept my gifts.' But Elisha replied, 'As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts. And though Naaman urged him to take the gifts, Elisha refused. Then Naaman said, 'All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer any burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the LORD.'"

I can understand why Naaman was insulted by Elisha's seeming lack of good manners or diplomatic skills and his distasteful instructions for healing. It was demeaning, if not a bit ridiculous, for a proud, highly-placed, distinguished man. Yet, *it worked* – and without "important" human or material "influence." It was a gift from God. It was free. It was unpretentious. Because of his earlier misconceptions and his feelings of self-importance, Naaman almost didn't get healed of his dreaded disease. (Can't you just visualize him ranting, raving and protesting, ready to return home still covered with the deadly leprosy!) But he was desperate enough and wise enough to follow through on the odd instructions of God's earthly representative.

You, too, will make a wise move if you begin to appreciate the wisdom of God's "foolishness" in the matter of your soul's salvation.

The Old Testament of the Bible chronicles numerous incidences when God asks individuals to do preposterous things requiring complete trust in his (God's) goodness and wisdom. In each case, the intended outcome is to (1) test people's faith in him, (2) demonstrate his ability in "impossible" situations and (3) typify the New Testament plan of salvation. Some examples of those who passed the test are: Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Joshua.

It seems reasonable to me that *"...the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength....God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong"* (1 Corinthians 1:25,27).

"Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness;' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile'" (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

"I am the Lord...who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense..." (Isaiah 44:24-25).

"Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'" (Luke 10:21).

There is a lot of sense in God's supposed nonsense. *"For the message of the cross [of Christ] is foolishness [sheer folly] to those who are perishing, but to us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe"* (1 Corinthians 1:18-21. Emphasis added.)

It is as though God is saying to humanity, "Since you have become so foolish, I will respond to your foolishness with my foolishness." (See Romans 1:21; Titus 3:3)

There is profound purpose behind God's faith concept. *"...so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it ...We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:5-8,12-14).

What is needed to see the wisdom behind the "foolishness" of the Gospel?

Here are a few prerequisites:

- Be proactive, persistent and passionate in your quest for God.
- Be open to the authenticity of the Word of God – the Bible.

- Pray for spiritual enlightenment.
- Have the faith and trust of a child.
- Be prepared to be considered a fool in the eyes of the world.

**"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you,
then they fight you, then you win."**

- Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).

**This is what King Solomon says about divine wisdom,
which God gives to those who ask for it.**

Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding.

Cry out for insight and understanding.

Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure.

*Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD,
and you will gain knowledge of God.*

*For the LORD grants wisdom!
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

*He grants a treasure of good sense to the godly.
He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity.*

*He guards the paths of justice
and protects those who are faithful to him.*

*Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you
will know how to find the right course of action every time.*

*For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will fill you with joy.*

*Wise planning will watch over you.
Understanding will keep you safe.*

(Proverbs 1:2-11 NLT. See also James 1:5.)

Faith *first*, then substantiation

"He [God] ...set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit..." (2 Corinthians 1:21,22).

"For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love" (Romans 5:5).

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16).

(His presence within me is all the proof I need.)

But even after we cognitively and experientially meet God, we still continue to live by faith because there are many more doors to go through; there are many things we don't know or understand. Although I've had what I think is a reasonably good relationship with my heavenly Father and – simultaneously - have studied the Bible for seven decades, he is still teaching me new things every day. And, in many ways, I'm just a beginner. ("I am not young enough to know everything." - Oscar Wilde.)

So, while God, over time, has proven himself (literally, solidly and adequately) to me, he cannot transplant that readymade proof into the mind and heart of another person. This could be disconcerting and frustrating, if it were not for the fact that everybody must come to God in their own unique way – and, of course, always *by faith* in the One who can and should be fully trusted.

Science and conscience

Human life on earth is not an amoral, purely physical process or *scientific* experiment; it is clearly a spiritual, ethical and, definitely, a relational one. We do not need to perform microscopic or cosmic tests to discover and connect with God. (A highly unusual but authentic and preclusive connective procedure has already been established – through the person of Christ.)

Even though God challenges us to “prove” him, to put him to the test (See Malachi 3:10) and enter into a reasonable dialog with him (See Isaiah 1:18.), it is still based on belief and fixed on faith. God himself is not engaged in scientific testing or exploration on earth. After all, he made and maintains it all. And we would do well to determine *his* interests, *his* priorities and *his* purposes. We would be wise to recognize *his* program and go along with *his* plans for us.

If we really did evolve from an inexplicable single cell (And what happened to the *double* cell?) to a “monkey” and then to what we are today, why do we continue to question our beginnings? On the surface, we seem to believe our theories but, deep down, we are not sure. Most humanistic scientists would like to discover and prove conclusively the origin and destiny of humans (who we were and who we will become) - whether or not they encounter God in the process. So, ultimately, the goal of “science” and of “religion” is similar.

In his article, "Making Waves," (Woodbury, NY: AIP Press, American Institute of Physics, 1995, page 161), Nobel laureate physicist Charles Townes writes, "The goal of science is to discover the ORDER in the universe... The goal of religion may be stated...as an understanding...of the PURPOSE and MEANING of our universe and how we fit into it. Most religions see a unifying and inclusive ORIGIN of meaning, and this supreme purposeful force we call GOD...It is interesting that the Japanese word for PHYSICS is *butsurei*, which translated means simply THE REASONS FOR THINGS. Thus we readily and inevitably link closely together the NATURE and the PURPOSE of our universe."

When we find God, we also find purpose and meaning. Denying his existence, we continue to search – in vain.

Deliberately or involuntarily, scientists cannot avoid bringing their personal theistic or atheistic beliefs into their searching and researching. There can be no such thing as totally impartial human scientific pursuit and conclusions. Scientists have made great strides in many areas, except when it comes to human behavior. They cannot change human nature for the better. The greatest mysteries and challenges are not in outer space; they are in our personal inner space.

Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th president of the USA. He wrote: "A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad."

There were those who trusted the fatally flawed theories of Marx and Engels. They believed human nature could be changed through *education*. Now, they see the fruit of their misguided faith. Illiterate, simple sinners became educated, sophisticated sinners. Not the best kind of progress. Not exactly a better world. This morning's newspaper exposes the ongoing, increasing corruption in society: politics, business, entertainment, education and religion - in *every* country.

**"Everything has been figured out,
except how to live."**

- Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980).

Cutting-edge Science: Voice Command

We will never determine the origin of matter through purely scientific studies if we exclude God from the equation. "*By wisdom the LORD founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the clouds poured down rain*" (Proverbs 3:19-20, NLT). "*You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created*" (Revelation 4:11). For the vast majority of people, there is only one way to know how and why the universe came into being: by believing what God says in the Bible.

Man can use voice command on things that already exist. God commands the appearance of things *out of nothing*.

"*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry hosts by the breath of his mouth....For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm*" (Psalm 33:6,9. Emphasis added.) If there is such a thing as cutting-edge science, *this is it!* (And the Bible disclosed it no less than 3500 years ago!) It was God's omnipotent word - his "voice command" that created matter.

"*God...gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist*" (Romans 4:17). "*Through faith we understand that the world came into being by the command of God, so that what is seen does not owe its existence to that which is visible*" (Hebrews 11:3, Weymouth). The visible comes from the invisible by the power of the spoken word.

"*...long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed...*" (2 Peter 3:5).

Not only did God create almost everything (Genesis 1:27) by voice command but, "*The Son is...sustaining all things by his powerful word*" (Hebrews 1:3). God is able to speak things into existence and then maintain them, because of the extraordinary force (energy) behind his words. And, "*By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare*" (2 Peter 3:7,10).

By the way, Christ is called Logos – the Word. “...his name is the Word of God” (Revelation 19:13). “*In the beginning [‘before the world began,’ John 17:5] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning [of our world]. Through him all things were made [came into being]; without [apart from] him nothing was made that has been made.*” (John 1:1-3).

Chronologically, Jesus Christ was not “the Son of God” until he became incarnate; before that, he was “the Word.” (And he still is.)

I don’t know what you think, but while I am definitely awed by God’s power to speak things into existence, I am far more impressed by the power of his marvelous mercy and grace, as demonstrated by his bighearted, self-sacrificing plan of salvation. And I am equally impressed that he wants to have a personal relationship with you and me.

Anyway, *we can know* who we are and why we are here. The textbook has already been written. It is futile to look beyond the Bible, although the testimony of nature and conscience provide strong evidence. Do you want to make the greatest discovery of your life? Ask God to open your spiritual eyes so that you can see the truths found in his Word. If you don’t find fault, you’ll find faith. It’s fitting that you do it as humbly, as earnestly and as honestly as you possibly can. That is the appropriate approach to God. Without this attitude, the Bible will remain a closed book to you. Keep in mind that you are dealing with none other than the originator and sustainer of the universe.

Discover, decode, diversify

In recent years, medical scientists are discovering how complex the human body really is. It seems to me that this added knowledge would point and push them toward belief in an extremely capable creator. In other words, if it takes exceptional, specially-trained “Einstein” minds -- with the help of computer science -- just to *unlock* the already existing secrets of the human body, could those same secrets have come into being unconsciously, without the power and plan of a superior intellect? If the answer is yes, then I ask: How? What are the odds of that ever haphazardly happening? And, who is qualified to configure and confirm those odds?

Now, medical scientists have uncovered what they call *the Golden Path, the Yellow Brick Road, the book of life*. It’s a meticulous “map” of human physical life. The human genome has been decoded. It encompasses recording, *in the correct order*, 3.1 billion nucleotides (sub-units), “letters” or bits of DNA. I am truly amazed by this achievement. But scientists did not *create* the genome. They can only discover, decode and diversify what is already there. They can continue to deny the obvious, or they can recognize a supremely intelligent and able architect.

Most recently, scientists are excited about the possibility of creating life “from scratch” – *scratch* they did not create. *So, what’s the big deal?* It turns out the *scratch* they are using is already in existence, *scratch* that God created a long time ago. Astronomer Carl Sagan (1934-1996) once wrote: “If you wish to make an apple pie truly from scratch, you must first invent the universe.”

Virgin birth

The more we know about parthenogenesis (unfertilized reproduction), the easier it is to accept Jesus Christ’s virgin birth. In any case, is not the one who created the human body from scratch capable of performing a virgin birth? (Had Joseph been his real father,

Jesus would have been exactly the same as all other human beings. If Jesus was not virgin born, then he could not be the Savior. He had to be, at the same time, divinity and sinless humanity in order to be a successful redeemer.)

The One who created chromosomes, DNA and parthenogenesis, knew the important role they would play when he made arrangements for Christ's virgin birth. Some theologians hypothesize about the human-divine DNA that Christ had and has. Well, the Bible does not give us detailed information about this question. So, we can continue to speculate (which frequently leads to bizarre hypotheses) or we can accept the biblical account "as is."

How Jesus Christ was conceived

According to the Gospel of Luke: "... God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, 'Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!' Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 'Don't be frightened, Mary,' the angel told her, 'for God has decided to bless you! You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!'

"Mary asked the angel, 'but how can I have a baby? I am a virgin.' The angel replied, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's already in her sixth month. *For nothing is impossible with God.*' Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true.' And then the angel left" (Luke 1:26-38, NLT).

According to the Gospel of Matthew: "Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly.

"As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All of this happened to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: 'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (meaning, God is with us).'

"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded. He brought Mary home to be his wife, but *she remained a virgin until her son was born.* And Joseph named him Jesus" (Matthew 1:18-25, NLT).

The *theory* of evolution

Why do many scientists still say they believe in the theory of evolution rather than in creation? Maybe the obstacle is not so much *creation* as it is *Creator*. But, where is the preponderance of valid evidence: on the side of evolution or on the side of creation?

It's interesting that evolutionists rightfully recognize creation to be a "religious" concept. They say, for example, that teaching creationism in public schools is teaching religion. That's because the one performing the creative act is a *moral* God. (If there was no holy God behind creation, would it be easier to accept?) Everything God does is inherently "religious." It follows, then, (in the mind of an atheist) that teaching creationism is "indoctrination," but the teaching of evolution is "science." So, the secular humanistic theory of the origin of life continues to have a monopolistic stranglehold on the public school system – at least here in "Christian" America. There is no room for "a second opinion."

The theory of evolution has been around a long time and still proves nothing. It is, after all, only a theory, and a worrisome one, at that. It is the evolutionist's proverbial albatross: once you declare adherence to it, you're stuck with it. Incongruously, without a shred of proof or even serious evidence, the theory of evolution is still taught in our schools. *Even so*, only 15 % of the population in the USA believes we evolved without the initiation or facilitation of some sort of supernatural power.

If we believe we can confidently teach evolution *as truth*, then we need mathematical proof. We must insist on scientific, credible, concrete proof. (At stake here is not a subsequent, contained, "evolutionary" process within species.) *We are justified in requiring proof that matter and life appeared and evolved without external, intelligent assistance.*

Serious scientists build their case and reputation on facts - not on assumptions, conjectures and even concoctions. If you say something often enough, you begin to believe it – especially if you *want* to believe it. But, to say that something is so, does not make it so. To state that evolution is a fact (and not a theory) is not enough; it must be proven. To date, it has not been proven. *And it will always be a theory.* So, evolutionists continue to grasp at straws and, in some cases, to manufacture them.

Who will give me the facts about how everything started in the first place? How did Time and Space make their quiet but impressive debut? What existed *before* the Big Bang? A nearly infinite energy density? If so, what is the origin of this immeasurable mass of mindless power? But it may very well have been only a Baby Bang – comparatively speaking. Who knows? Maybe there was no bang at all. If it all started with a "tiny primordial mass," where did that unassuming blob come from? Can chaos convert itself into order? Can non-life give birth to life? (By the way, many of today's scientists talk about the "Big Bang" as though it is already a proven fact. In reality, it is only one of many theories of the origin of the universe. Based on the strength of the biblical explanation of the origin of matter and life, none of these theories will ever be proven.)

If we don't know, then we are *believers* in some sort of presupposed, humanly conceived, humanly contrived process – no matter how cleverly it is doctored, how attractively it is packaged, how impressive it appears, how convincing it sounds. Keep in mind that, for human nature, it is easier to accept soothing lies than to embrace uncomfortable truth. But, we shouldn't let anything keep us from *The Truth*. Jesus said, "I am...truth ..." (John 14:6). So, who...what is he? Is he delusional, is he lying, or is "The Truth" telling the truth about himself?

If I don't want to believe that the God of the Bible created matter and life, then I don't know how it happened. Any purely humanistic speculation about the origin of life is just that: *speculation*. Charles Darwin titled one of his books: On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection. But, nowhere in his text does he claim to prove how matter – dead or alive – originated.

The deeper cosmologists probe space, the less some of them are sure about their theories. That is a good start toward humility and honesty, but they still have a long way to go before they finally kneel at the *Cross of Christ* – the divinely designed and designated *Meeting Place* for God and man. *Simply acknowledging the existence of God resolves nothing*. If I do come to the place where I admit the reality of God but reject the reality of a personal Savior, my admission will leave me empty, disappointed and without hope.

If you are a scientist and you excel in your field, you stand a good chance of being assigned -- by God himself -- to important projects in the next life. But, for that to happen, you must first reconcile your relationship with God through his chosen go-between – the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't let pride or prejudice keep you from an endless, challenging relationship with our good and glorious God.

**“Science is like a captured spy;
torture it long enough
and it will say anything.”**

– William Ruckelshaus, first director of the Environmental Protection Agency (USA)

Saving face or saving faith?

If I really want to connect with God significantly, I will have to stop making excuses; stop ignoring, dismissing or denying the evidence; stop trying to do it *my way* – by presumption, pride or proof – and do it *his way*. After all, I am the spiritually sick patient and God is the Great Physician. He knows what's wrong with me and it is he who prescribes what will make me whole. Believing and acting on that prescription (the Bible) will save my soul. “...*the holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 3:15). (See also 1 Corinthians 15:2.) I don't have to do my own limited, biased and erroneous self-analysis. I don't have to mix my own useless remedies. I don't have to write detrimental prescriptions for myself or for others.

I need to know that, ultimately, I will meet my Maker. Meanwhile, I can accept his forgiveness and eternal salvation through Christ, or I can reject his marvelous grace now and reap his warranted anger later. It's my choice. I can't buy my salvation in Christ. He already paid for it with his life.

“Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment... For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 11:9;12:14).

God knows very well that people are ignoring him *deliberately* and, for that (if they continue), he will deal with them severely. *“Because they have no respect for the works of the Lord, or for the things which his hands have made, they will be broken down and not lifted up by him”* (Psalm 28:5. BBE).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews cautions us in chapter 2:2-3: *“For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”* *“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’”* (Hebrews 3:7-8). Thank God for his timely warning!

The Sovereign Lord declares: *“As surely as I live, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”* (Ezekiel 33:11). However, if we insult God’s grace we will incur his wrath. This is no cheap scare tactic. This is no joke, no fiction. It’s all very real. I’m sharing biblical certainties we all need to be aware of. We have to know what awaits us if we snub the Gospel. God’s grace, revealed through his plan of salvation, is marvelous beyond expression. When rejected, it justifiably provokes wrath beyond description. In this life, we may choose what we want to believe; we may, in effect, live as we please. God will not stop us; he will not use force to make us believe in him, to live for him. But, the eventual consequences of rejecting, ridiculing or rebelling against God and his Christ are unparalleled in human experience.

“Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot...and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?... It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:28,29,31). There is a fate worse than death.

“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31).

“I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth...I watched as he [Christ] opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” (Revelation 6:8,12-17).

“... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire... He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts” (Ephesians 4:17-18).

“They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth...” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). They perish, not because they don’t know the truth but because they refuse to obey it. (See 1 Peter 1:22.)

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked [literally, snubbed]; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8).

Lacking a right relationship with God through Christ, sure destruction and permanent ruin awaits us – not the destruction of our identity, but of life as we knew it on earth. And this will be a final, irreversible, everlasting condition. Theologian Matthew Henry comments: "They shall be always dying, and yet never die. Their misery will run parallel with the line of eternity. The chains of darkness are everlasting chains, and the fire is everlasting fire... since the punishment is inflicted by an eternal God, fastening upon an immortal soul, set out of the reach of divine mercy and grace." (See Matthew 18:8; 25:41,46; Hebrews 6:2; Revelation 14:11; 20:10.)

**"To sit alone with my conscience
will be judgment enough for me."**

- Charles William Stubbs.

Today, you are faced with only two options: God's grace or God's wrath. The Lord will be either your loving Savior or your angry Judge. Which do you choose? Either way, you definitely *will* meet your Creator. *And*, you will be judged, you will bow to Jesus Christ and you will *"...confess that [he] is Lord..."* (Philippians 2:10-11). (God keeps track of absolutely everyone; no one falls between the cracks. He knows how to preserve everyone's identity.)

Don't you want to meet him *now* – as your Father in Heaven? Christ wants to introduce you to your God -- whoever you are: young or old, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, theistic or atheistic.

Divine protocol

(God's plan of salvation)

Recognition

Acknowledging a universal truth.

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23).

"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him [God] out to be a liar..." (1 John 1:10).

Repentance

Confessing that I, personally, have been mistaken and have done wrong.

"He [the Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Reconciliation

Making peace with God

"I [Jesus] tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him [God the Father] who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24).

"...God...reconciled us to himself through Christ...not counting men's [people's] sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

Reception

Inviting Jesus into my heart.

"...to all who received him [Jesus Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God" (John 1:12).

Receiving not only the person of Christ, but also the gift of eternal life.

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

"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

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

Regeneration

Experiencing spiritual rebirth

"...the children of God [have] been born of God. [The child of God] ...has eternal life in him. Those who obey his commands [who believe in his Son and love one another] live in him [Jesus Christ] and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 3:9,10,15,24).

Reassurance

Affirming salvation.

"...because Jesus lives forever...he is able to save completely those who come to God through him..." (Hebrews 7:24,25).

"We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God, has made him out to be a liar...And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13).

"...if you will confess with your mouth: 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Believe "in your heart," not just in your head. Make Jesus not only your Savior but also the Lord of your life. Sooner

or later, willingly or reluctantly, everyone of us will “...confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11).

I am not urging you to accept a religion. Neither am I urging you to accept Christianity as simply dogma. You need to accept Christ. There are already too many nominal Christians – people to whom Christ will one day say, “*I never knew you,*” because they never knew him. “*The Lord knows those who are his...*” (2 Timothy 2:19). It’s all about knowing *him*, not just knowing *about* him. An acceptance of Christianity or even of Christ, by mental acknowledgement alone, limited to the intellect only, is worse than worthless. Better you remain an atheist.

But if you want to receive Christ, then put your whole heart into it! Put your whole being into it. God will accept nothing less. If you do that, the Spirit of God will take up residence in you and will make you what the Bible calls a “new creation.” Then you will be able to live the so-called “Christian” life. Without his indwelling presence, you will not be able to please God, because we are talking about a supernatural life. I cannot live up to God’s expectations in my own strength and wisdom. He wants me to choose – wholeheartedly, willingly and voluntarily - good instead of evil. This choice of good instead of evil includes all my thoughts, feelings, words and actions. But, for this to happen, I definitely will need divine assistance. And God is more than willing to help me.

Are you ready - consciously and eagerly - to connect with God? If yes, then tell him what’s on your heart. If you don’t know what to say, here is a declaration (prayer?) you can make your own. If you are serious about this most important decision of your life, God’s Spirit will walk you through it. ***Don’t let anything or anyone deter you.***

Lord!

***I confess that I am a sinner in your eyes
and am not worthy to approach you.***

***But, I come to you in the name and worthiness
of your Son and my Savior, the Lord Jesus.***

Thank you for accepting me, just as I am.

***I believe Christ died on the cross to pay for my sins
and rose from the dead for my justification.***

***By faith, I accept your gracious gifts
of forgiveness and eternal life.***

I invite Jesus Christ into my heart right now.

I want his Spirit to help me live a life that pleases you.

From this moment and throughout eternity,

I am your devoted child

and you are my compassionate heavenly Father.

Report

Sharing the “gospel” (good news) with others.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-19. Emphasis added).

“Whoever acknowledges me [Jesus Christ] before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Read

Read the Bible every day to get food for your soul, to grow and stay spiritually strong.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105).

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...” (1 Peter 2:2).

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

Relationship

Find and connect yourself to a church of genuine followers of Christ. You need to be ministered to and you need to minister to others. The church is like a body with a head and body parts. Body members need each other. You can't develop and be spiritually healthy if you fail to be in fellowship, on a regular basis, with other born again believers.

“Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day [of Christ's return] approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16). (See also 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.)

My connection with Christ

Although I became a convinced theist at age four (“Goodbye, Ladybug!”), it was not until much later that I experienced God himself. One memorable, momentous evening, when I was fifteen, there was a battle raging in, and for, my soul. The Spirit of God was strongly encouraging me to receive Christ as my personal Savior, while Satan was putting up an equally strong argument and endeavoring to keep me under his control.

The struggle was intense, extraordinary. I was emotionally, physically, visibly shaken. Finally, at one point, the Holy Spirit said to me: “If you refuse me tonight, there is no guarantee I will continue to fight for your soul.” It was then that I told Satan I owed him nothing and the Lord everything. And I wholeheartedly received Christ as Savior.

I hesitate to tell you what happened next because, in all probability, your experience is (or will be) different. And I don't want you to make comparisons or have certain expectations. However, it is true that, sooner or later, the element of heaven-sent *joy* comes into the picture for all those who choose to follow Christ. In my case, a totally unanticipated, indescribable, supernatural joy filled my being, a joy that can only be explained as coming directly from God. And an excessively high level of joy (at the same time extremely pleasurable yet inappropriate for an ongoing normal life) stayed with me for two weeks before it subsided to a lower level. I should point out that this kind of joy is not only empirical but also theologically sound. It is God simply fulfilling one of his faithful promises.

Here are just a few biblical references about the joy that God gives those who are born of his Spirit. By the way, when you receive this kind of affirmation from God, you have no need of additional proof.

"...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17, NAS).

"...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8, NAS).

"These things I [Jesus] have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11, NAS).

Although you may very well experience a sense of relief, of assurance and much more, be sure to accept salvation by *faith*, because that's what it's all about. Don't have any preconceived ideas about *feelings*. In any case, if you do your part sincerely, God will do his part. He loves you. How much? Enough to suffer and die for you. He is worthy of your living for him.

Benefits of associating with God

In this life

You receive the redemption of God, acceptance by him, and an inheritance from him. You become part of the Body of Christ (an elite group) and you are endowed with true wisdom. (See Ephesians 1:6-23)

- God's Spirit (with Christ's character) comes to live in you forever.
- The salvation of your undying soul is guaranteed.
- Your wrongdoings - all of them - are forgiven.
- Feelings of guilt are gone.
- You get peace *with* God and the peace *of* God.
- You become a member of your Heavenly Father's immediate family.

- You possess power over temptation and sin.
- You sense supernatural strength to please your Creator.
- You experience inexpressible joy.
- You receive a lavish installation of God's incomparable love.
- You have an ongoing, direct relationship with your Maker.
- You discover the true reason for living.

In the next life

- You will discard your earthy body and sinful nature and receive a glorified, heavenly, spiritual body and mind.
- You will enjoy everlasting life with God and his people.
- You will be occupied with productive projects and pleasurable pursuits.