

Always Be Prepared!

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By pastor Mark Westman

Beyond any doubt, the most significant question that we all have to struggle with is the existence of God. More consequences for good or evil hinge on the denial or affirmation of God’s existence than any other issue. It is no secret that most colleges are hostile to the biblical God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. There are members of our church that have sent their children off to a liberal college only to see them return as strangers robbed of their faith in God. Sadly, these children no longer live by a biblical worldview. Many try in vain to fill the spiritual emptiness in their lives with sex, drugs, and rock and roll lifestyles. Others have sought to fill this void with material success or they give their lives over to worldly causes (save the whales, global warming, radical politics, etc.) These things never work long term because we are made in the image of God. Only God can meet our deepest spiritual needs.

“Is there really a God?” Though there are a variety of possible responses to this question, three basic traditional responses dominate Western thought: (1) God does not exist – *atheism* (2) we cannot know whether God exists – *agnosticism* (3) God does exist – *theism*. What can we say to help someone become a theist and open their minds and hearts to the Gospel?

To begin with, atheism involves a logical fallacy known as a *universal negative*. Simply stated, no one can say, “There is no God!” because only someone capable of being in all places at the same time – with as perfect knowledge of all that is in the universe- can make such a statement *based on the facts*. In other words, a person would have to be God to say there is no God. Hence, the assertion is logically indefensible. By using arguments like this, you will often find that an atheist quickly convert to agnosticism.

If you ever talk with an open-minded agnostic, and approach I have found effective is to point out that the universe is an *effect* that requires a sufficient *cause*, and logically the only sufficient cause is God. As Scripture says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps. 19:1). It is helpful to clarify that there are only four possible explanations for how the universe came to be. The first is that the universe is an illusion. This ultimately reduces to *solipsism* – the belief that “self” is the only reality and that “I alone exist in my own mind.” This view is unacceptable in an age of scientific enlightenment. As one of my favorite Christian authors, Dr. Ravi Zacharias, often says, “Even a full-blown solipsist looks both ways before crossing the street.”

The second possibility is that the universe is eternal. This possibility goes against the second law of thermodynamics that basically says that everything in the universe is running inexorably downhill from *order to disorder*, from *complexity to chaos*. If the universe was eternally old, it would have died a heat-loss death (entropy) an eternity ago.

The third “possibility” is that the universe emerged from nothing. Little needs to be said about the absurdity of this option. Reason tells us that *out of nothing comes* nothing. This position breaks the first law of thermodynamics that says energy can be neither created nor destroyed; it can only change forms. To say an *effect* can exist without a *cause*, one must deny the basis for all scientific investigation and rational thought.

The fourth (and only tenable) possibility is that the universe was created by something outside space and time that was infinitely powerful and creative. Clearly, theism – the belief in a God who is the creator of the universe – is the only viable and logical option. Once this is established, it can be pointed out that there is only one God revealed through the various world religions who exists outside space and time and is truly able to create our vast universe, the biblical God. Then you can take the next step and show that only a *personal* God as revealed in the Bible can account for human personality, art, wonder, culture, morality, and a need for worship. Furthermore, this personal God has manifested Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated his deity through the undeniable fact of the resurrection. Additionally, God has provided his written Word that can be shown to be divine rather than human in origin.

Although our logic and clever answers cannot talk atheists and agnostics into the Kingdom of God, God can use our answers to open their hearts to receive the gospel. Scripture exhorts us to do so. ***“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (I Peter 3:15-16).***