

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 2: THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Lesson 4

That God Exists — The Self-Evident and the Argued

The Innate Knowledge of God and the Classical Arguments

Key Texts: Romans 1:18–21; Psalm 19:1–4; Acts 14:15–17; Acts 17:22–31

The God Who Cannot Be Escaped and Cannot Be Ignored

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Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Introduction

With Lesson 4 we cross the threshold from Unit 1, the prolegomenal foundations of Theology Proper, into Unit 2: The Existence of God. In our first three lessons we have established how God can be known, what instruments He has graciously given for that knowing, and how human language can speak truly of the One who infinitely exceeds all creaturely comprehension. We have, in other words, cleared the epistemological ground and built the methodological framework. Now we take up what may appear to be the most elementary of all theological questions, but which is in fact one of the most profound: Does God exist?

On one level, the question seems almost impertinent for a series in Theology Proper. We do not come to this study as detached inquirers who have suspended judgment on the existence of God while we weigh the evidence. We come as those who have been found by Him, who have heard His voice in the gospel, who have been regenerated by His Spirit and are learning to know Him through His Word. For us, the existence of God is not a hypothesis to be tested but a reality to be explored, the unshakeable bedrock beneath all our thinking, all our living, and all our worshipping.

And yet the question “Does God exist?” is not merely an academic formality to be dispensed with before the real theological work begins. It is a question with enormous pastoral and apologetic stakes in our present cultural moment. We live in a generation in which explicit atheism has moved from the academic margins into the cultural mainstream, in which the default assumption of a growing segment of the population is not theism but naturalism, not the existence of the God of Scripture but the self-sufficiency of the material universe. The church must be equipped, not merely to hold its own conviction firmly, but to commend the knowledge of God to a world that has, in the words of Paul, “suppressed the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18, NASB 1995). This lesson is designed to equip us for that task, by grounding us first in the biblical witness to the self-evidence of God’s existence, and then by surveying the great classical arguments that the church and its apologists have employed in the service of that witness.

I. The *Sensus Divinitatis*: The Knowledge of God Written on Every Heart

We begin not with arguments but with a prior and more fundamental reality: the innate, implanted knowledge of God that the Reformed theological tradition, following the apostle Paul and John Calvin, has called the *sensus divinitatis*, the “sense of divinity.” This is not a conclusion reached by inference or a conviction acquired through education. It is, in Calvin’s language, “a sense of divinity inscribed in the hearts of all,” planted there by God Himself, such that no human being comes into the world as a blank slate with respect to the knowledge of God.

Calvin’s teaching on the *sensus divinitatis* is not a theological novelty; it is a careful systematization of the apostle Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18–21. Paul’s argument

begins not with human seeking but with divine disclosure: “Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” (Romans 1:19, NASB 1995). The knowledge of God that renders all humanity without excuse is not a knowledge that human beings have stumbled upon through observation and inference; it is a knowledge that God has actively “made evident”, planted, inscribed, revealed, within them. It is prior to argument. It is prior to philosophy. It is prior to religious experience. It is the native endowment of every creature made in the image of God.

This has a decisive consequence for how we understand the project of natural theology and the apologetic arguments we will survey later in this lesson. The classical arguments for God’s existence, the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments, are not, on the Reformed account, instruments for generating a knowledge of God that would not otherwise exist. They are instruments for making explicit and articulate what is already, in some form, known. They are “andlesticks,” if we may use such an image, that make visible a light that was already present in the room, though perhaps unacknowledged. This is the distinction our outline identifies as foundational to this lesson: the difference between proving God’s existence and demonstrating what is already known.

The pastoral implication of the *sensus divinitatis* is both sobering and encouraging. It is sobering because it means that the person who denies God’s existence is not a person who lacks the relevant knowledge; he is a person who is actively suppressing it. Paul’s language in Romans 1:18 is stark: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” The Greek word for “suppress” (*katechō*) means to hold down, to restrain, to keep in check. The atheist, on Paul’s account, is not a seeker who has failed to find; he is a knower who is working, often with considerable intellectual energy, to keep from acknowledging what he already knows. It is encouraging because it means that when we commend the knowledge of God to our neighbors, we are not introducing a wholly foreign idea into a mind that has no apparatus for receiving it. We are addressing a knowledge that God Himself has already placed there, calling it forth from beneath the suppression of sin into the light of confessed truth.

II. Romans 1:18–21 and the Universal, Suppressed Knowledge of God

Because Romans 1:18–21 is the primary scriptural foundation for everything in this lesson, it deserves careful and extended attention. The passage reads:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”, Romans 1:18–21, NASB 1995

Several features of this passage demand close attention. First, notice the structure of Paul’s argument. He moves from the revelation of divine wrath (v. 18) to its basis in

universal divine disclosure (vv. 19–20) to the human response of suppression and futility (vv. 21–23). The wrath of God is not arbitrary; it is grounded in the fact that human beings have been given genuine, clear, and sufficient knowledge of God and have deliberately rejected it. The accountability of humanity before God is thus not based on a knowledge they ought to have sought and failed to find; it is based on a knowledge they have received and refused.

Second, notice the content of what is disclosed: “His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature.” Paul is not claiming that creation reveals everything about God, we established in Lesson 2 that special revelation is required for saving knowledge. He is claiming that creation reveals enough: enough to establish that God exists, that He is eternal and omnipotent, that He is the sovereign Creator to whom all creatures owe worship and gratitude. This is a knowledge rich enough to ground universal accountability, even if it is not rich enough to save.

Third, notice the mechanism of disclosure: “being understood through what has been made.” The created order is not merely a stage on which the drama of redemption unfolds; it is itself a form of divine speech, addressed to every rational creature. The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1); the seasons bear witness to His goodness (Acts 14:17); the moral order written on the human conscience testifies to His righteousness (Romans 2:14–15). This speech of creation is not obscure or esoteric; it is, Paul insists, “clearly seen.” The verb *kathoratai* is compound and emphatic, indicating not a faint impression but a transparent visibility.

Fourth, and most sobering of all, notice the human response: “They became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” The darkening of the human mind in Romans 1 is not the original condition of humanity but the judicial consequence of suppressing the truth. God gives people over, three times Paul uses the phrase “God gave them over” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28), to the consequences of their own chosen suppression. The human mind, left to itself in its suppression of the knowledge of God, does not achieve an honest agnosticism; it plunges into an ever-deepening darkness, exchanging the truth of God for ever more elaborate and ever more futile substitutes.

III. Proving God’s Existence vs. Demonstrating What Is Already Known

Before surveying the classical arguments, we must fix clearly in our minds the distinction our outline draws between proving God’s existence and demonstrating what is already known. This distinction has profound implications for how we understand the apologetic enterprise and how we deploy the classical arguments in the service of the gospel.

On one end of the spectrum, evidentialism holds that the existence of God must be established through neutral, publicly accessible evidence and argument, as if the question were entirely open and both theism and atheism were equally live options for any rational inquirer. On this account, the apologetic task is essentially forensic: we present our evidence, the unbeliever weighs it, and if the evidence is sufficient, the

conclusion follows. The classical theistic arguments, cosmological, teleological, moral, ontological, are often deployed in this mode.

On the other end of the spectrum, presuppositionalism, associated especially with Cornelius Van Til and his Reformed successors, insists that the existence of God is not a conclusion to be argued to but the necessary precondition of all rational argument whatsoever. On this account, the atheist's denial of God is not merely false; it is self-defeating, because the very laws of logic, the reliability of sense experience, and the intelligibility of moral judgment that the atheist invokes in his argument against God are themselves only possible if God exists. The apologetic task is not to argue toward God from neutral common ground; it is to expose the internal incoherence of any worldview that denies Him.

The position most consistent with the biblical account of the *sensus divinitatis* is neither naive evidentialism nor the version of presuppositionalism that refuses any engagement with the classical arguments. It is a Reformed apologetic that affirms both the noetic effects of sin, the way in which suppressed truth distorts all human reasoning, and the genuine, if subordinate, usefulness of the classical arguments as instruments for pressing the implanted knowledge of God into clearer articulation. We do not argue toward a God who might or might not exist; we bear witness to the God whose existence every creature already knows and whose reality the classical arguments illuminate from multiple angles. The arguments do not create knowledge; they call it forth.

IV. The Cosmological Argument: From Existence to the Necessary Existent

The cosmological argument is, in its most basic form, the argument from the existence of the world to the existence of a necessary, uncaused first cause. It is one of the oldest and most enduring arguments in the history of philosophy and theology, appearing in various forms in Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz, and in contemporary form in the work of William Lane Craig and others. Its core logic can be stated with elegant simplicity:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The argument's strength lies in its first premise, which is one of the most intuitively obvious principles of rational thought: nothing comes from nothing. The principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*, out of nothing, nothing comes, is so basic to human experience and rational reflection that its denial amounts to an abandonment of intelligibility itself. If something exists now, there must always have been something, for nothing cannot produce something. If the universe, all matter, energy, space, and time, began to exist (as modern cosmology, in remarkable agreement with Genesis 1:1, now almost universally affirms), then the cause of the universe must itself be uncaused, beginningless, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, and of unimaginable power. This is precisely the God of Scripture.

The cosmological argument finds its scriptural resonance in the opening verse of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, NASB 1995). It also resonates with Hebrews 11:3: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” The universe is not self-explanatory; it points beyond itself to the One who called it into being. The cosmological argument is, in the end, a philosophical articulation of what creation itself declares: something that exists contingently, that might not have existed, cannot account for its own existence. It requires a necessary Being, one who exists in and of Himself, whose non-existence is impossible. Scripture calls this Being “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14, NASB 1995).

V. The Teleological Argument: From Design to the Intelligent Designer

The teleological argument, from the Greek *telos*, meaning “end” or “purpose”, is the argument from the order, complexity, and apparent purposiveness of the universe to the existence of an intelligent Designer. It is perhaps the most immediately accessible of all the classical arguments, because it draws on what every attentive observer of the natural world cannot help noticing: the universe is not a random collection of matter in motion, but a staggeringly complex and precisely ordered system in which every component seems to be calibrated for a purpose.

The classic formulation of the teleological argument in modern philosophy was given by William Paley in his 1802 work *Natural Theology*, where he introduced the famous watchmaker analogy: if we find a watch on a heath, the complexity and purposiveness of its mechanism immediately leads us to conclude that it was designed by an intelligent maker, not assembled by chance. The universe, with its incomparably greater complexity and purposiveness, demands the same inference to an incomparably greater Designer. While Paley’s specific formulation has been challenged by Darwinian evolutionary theory, the deeper logic of the argument has not only survived but been strengthened by the discoveries of modern physics and cosmology.

Contemporary versions of the teleological argument focus especially on what physicists call the fine-tuning of the universe: the extraordinary precision with which the fundamental constants of nature, the gravitational constant, the cosmological constant, the ratio of electromagnetic force to gravitational force, the initial entropy of the universe, and dozens of others, are set to values that permit the existence of carbon-based life. The probability that these constants would all fall within the life-permitting range by chance is, on the calculations of leading physicists, so vanishingly small as to be, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from zero. The fine-tuning of the universe is the cosmological equivalent of arriving at a crime scene where every piece of evidence has been arranged with meticulous precision and concluding that no one was responsible.

The teleological argument finds its most glorious scriptural expression in Psalm 19:1–4:

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.”, Psalm 19:1–4, NASB 1995

The psalmist’s vision of creation as a universal sermon preached in a wordless tongue to all the nations of the earth is the doxological counterpart to the philosopher’s inference from design to Designer. The stars that a physicist studies for their fine-tuning are the same stars that David watches “telling of the glory of God.” The argument and the worship point to the same Reality: a universe that could not have made itself, governed by laws that did not write themselves, bearing the unmistakable signature of the One who spoke it all into being.

VI. The Moral Argument: From Obligation to the Moral Lawgiver

The moral argument for the existence of God proceeds from the existence of objective moral values and obligations to the existence of a transcendent moral Lawgiver who grounds them. Its basic form is deceptively simple:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

The power of the moral argument lies in the second premise, which virtually every human being affirms in practice even if they deny it in theory. When we say that the Holocaust was not merely distasteful to those who opposed it but genuinely, objectively wrong, wrong even if the Nazis had won and rewritten the history books, we are affirming the existence of objective moral values. When we say that a man who tortures children for entertainment is not merely violating the social conventions of his culture but is doing something genuinely, universally, and timelessly evil, we are affirming the existence of objective moral obligations. These affirmations are not optional for a coherent moral life; they are its indispensable grammar.

But the first premise is equally indispensable: if there is no God, there is no basis for objective morality. In a purely materialist universe, a universe consisting of nothing but matter, energy, and the impersonal forces that govern their interaction, there are no moral facts. There is only what happens. The Holocaust was a physical event involving the rearrangement of molecules; on a purely materialist account, it was no more morally significant than an earthquake. The consistent atheist who recognizes this has only two options: he can embrace moral nihilism and admit that there are no objective moral facts, only preferences and social conventions; or he can quietly borrow from the theistic worldview he rejects, invoking the reality of objective moral obligations while denying the only metaphysical foundation that can support them.

The scriptural grounding of the moral argument is the doctrine of the image of God and the law written on the human heart. Paul declares in Romans 2:14–15 that even Gentiles who have not received the written law of Moses “show the work of the law

written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness.” The universal moral sense, the sense of guilt, of obligation, of right and wrong that transcends cultural conditioning and runs through every human civilization in history, is not an evolutionary artifact or a social construction. It is the moral image of God stamped upon every creature made in His likeness, bearing witness, however suppressed and distorted, to the reality of the Holy One whose character is the ultimate standard of all moral truth.

VII. The Ontological Argument: From the Concept of God to His Necessary Existence

The ontological argument is the most abstract, the most controversial, and in many respects the most fascinating of the classical arguments. Unlike the cosmological and teleological arguments, which move from observable features of the external world to an inference about God, the ontological argument moves entirely within the realm of concepts, arguing that the very idea of God, rightly understood, entails His existence. It was first formulated by Anselm of Canterbury in his *Proslogion* (c. 1078), and has been defended and reformulated by philosophers from Descartes and Leibniz in the early modern period to Alvin Plantinga in the contemporary era.

Anselm’s original formulation can be summarized as follows: God is defined as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” (*id quo maius cogitari nequit*). Now, even the fool who says in his heart “There is no God” understands this concept, he understands what he is denying. But if God exists only in the understanding and not in reality, then a greater being can be conceived, namely, a being with all the same properties but who also exists in reality. Therefore, a being who exists only in the understanding and not in reality cannot be the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, if God is the greatest conceivable being, He must exist in reality and not merely in the understanding.

Anselm’s argument has been criticized by Kant, among others, who objected that existence is not a predicate that can be logically derived from a concept. While this objection has force against certain formulations of the argument, it does not defeat the more sophisticated modal version developed by Alvin Plantinga in his 1974 work *The Nature of Necessity*. Plantinga’s argument proceeds through the concept of possible worlds: if a maximally great being, one with omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection, is even possible (if there is any possible world in which such a being exists), then such a being exists in every possible world, including the actual world. The key premise, that a maximally great being is at least possible, is far more intuitive than its denial, and Plantinga has argued that a person who accepts it is entirely within his rational rights in concluding that God exists.

For the student of Theology Proper, the ontological argument carries a particular theological significance that goes beyond its apologetic utility. It testifies to something that Scripture has always declared: the existence of God is not contingent. He does not merely happen to exist as one feature among many of the actual universe. He exists necessarily, He is the One whose non-existence is not merely improbable but impossible. This is the meaning of the divine name revealed to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14, NASB 1995). God does not exist derivatively, dependently, or

contingently. He is self-existent, aseic, the ground of all being, the One from whom and through whom and to whom are all things (Romans 11:36). The ontological argument, in its best formulations, is a philosophical articulation of the divine aseity that Scripture everywhere presupposes.

VIII. The Limits of Natural Theology: Arguments Can Confirm but Cannot Save

Having surveyed all four classical arguments with appreciation and respect, we must now state with equal clarity the limits of natural theology, lest we leave the impression that the apologetic arguments can accomplish what only the gospel can accomplish. This is not a concession born of timidity; it is a conviction born of Scripture.

The classical arguments, at their best, can establish several important conclusions: that a necessary, uncaused first cause exists (cosmological); that an intelligent Designer of the universe exists (teleological); that a transcendent moral Lawgiver exists (moral); that a maximally great, necessarily existent Being exists (ontological). These are not trivial conclusions. They clear away a great deal of intellectual underbrush and establish that theism is not a position for intellectual lightweights. They can be enormously useful in apologetic conversations as tools for pressing the implanted knowledge of God into clearer and more uncomfortable articulation in the conscience of the unbeliever.

But what the classical arguments cannot do, what no argument can do, is name the God they point to as the God of the Bible, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They can argue to a first cause; they cannot tell us that the first cause loves us and sent His Son to die for us. They can point to an intelligent designer; they cannot tell us that the Designer became flesh, dwelt among us, died under Pontius Pilate, rose on the third day, and is coming again to judge the living and the dead. They can establish the existence of a moral Lawgiver; they cannot tell us how the guilty sinner can be justified before that Lawgiver without violence to His righteousness.

For all of this, for the saving knowledge of the triune God, for the knowledge of grace, for the knowledge of the gospel, we require special revelation. We require the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Paul's words in Acts 17 are instructive here: after appealing to the general knowledge of God available to the Athenians through their own poets and religious instincts (Acts 17:22–29), he does not rest there. He moves immediately to the particular, historical, announced gospel:

“...He is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”, Acts 17:30–31, NASB 1995

The move from natural theology to gospel proclamation is not optional; it is the indispensable conclusion of all genuine apologetics. The arguments clear the ground; the gospel plants the seed. The arguments establish the existence of the God to whom all are accountable; the gospel announces the provision of the God who justifies the ungodly. The arguments can disturb the sleep of the comfortably irreligious; only the

Spirit through the Word can awaken the dead. This is not a limitation that diminishes the classical arguments; it is a reminder of the infinite superiority of the grace of God over the ingenuity of man.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

Romans 1:18–21

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

Psalm 19:1–4

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.”

Acts 14:15–17

“...We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

Acts 17:22–31 (selected)

“So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you ... He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist.’ ... ‘He is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness

through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Sensus Divinitatis	Latin for “sense of divinity.” The innate, implanted awareness of God that John Calvin, following Romans 1:19, taught is present in every human being. It is not an inference drawn from evidence but a direct, pre-theoretical knowledge of God planted by God Himself, rendering all humanity without excuse before Him.
Natural Theology	The discipline of deriving knowledge of God from the observation of the natural world and the exercise of human reason, apart from (or prior to) special revelation. Classical natural theology employs the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments. Reformed theology affirms its limited utility while insisting on its insufficiency for saving knowledge.
Cosmological Argument	The argument from the existence of the contingent universe to the existence of a necessary, uncaused first cause. In its Kalām form: (1) everything that begins to exist has a cause; (2) the universe began to exist; (3) therefore the universe has a cause that is itself uncaused, eternal, and omnipotent.
Teleological Argument	The argument from the order, complexity, and apparent purposiveness of the universe to the existence of an intelligent Designer. Contemporary forms focus especially on the fine-tuning of the universe’s fundamental constants, arguing that the extraordinary precision of these constants points to intentional design rather than blind chance.
Moral Argument	The argument from the existence of objective moral values and obligations to the existence of a transcendent moral Lawgiver. If there is no God, there are no objective moral facts, only preferences and social conventions. The near-universal human intuition that some things are genuinely and timelessly wrong (e.g., genocide, child abuse) presupposes the existence of a moral standard that transcends human culture and convention.
Ontological Argument	The argument from the concept of God to His necessary existence. In Anselm’s classic form: God is defined as that than which nothing greater can be conceived; a being who exists in reality is greater than one who exists only in the understanding; therefore God must exist in reality. In Plantinga’s modal form: if a maximally great Being is even possible, it exists in every possible world, including the actual world.

Evidentialism	The apologetic approach that argues for the existence of God primarily through publicly accessible evidence and argument, treating the question of God's existence as an open inquiry to be settled by the weight of evidence. Critiqued by presuppositionalists for assuming a neutrality that Romans 1 denies.
Presuppositionalism	The apologetic approach associated with Cornelius Van Til that argues God's existence is the necessary precondition of all rational thought, and that the proper apologetic method is to expose the internal incoherence of non-theistic worldviews rather than to argue toward God from neutral common ground.
Noetic Effects of Sin	The distorting influence of sin upon the human mind, will, and affections in relation to the knowledge of God. Romans 1:21–23 describes the darkening of the understanding and the futility of thought that result from the suppression of the truth of God. The noetic effects of sin mean that unaided human reason, apart from regeneration and the Spirit's illumination, is not a reliable path to saving knowledge of God.
Kalām Cosmological Argument	A specific form of the cosmological argument with roots in medieval Islamic philosophy and developed in contemporary form by William Lane Craig. The argument employs both philosophical reasoning and scientific evidence (the Big Bang and the Second Law of Thermodynamics) to argue that the universe had a beginning and therefore requires a cause outside itself.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the existence of God is not a conclusion we have arrived at by weighing evidence and finding theism more probable than atheism. We have been found by God. We have been regenerated by His Spirit, addressed by His Word, and drawn into the knowledge of His Son. Our confidence in the existence of God does not rest finally on the cosmological or teleological arguments, however valuable those arguments are; it rests on the self-authenticating testimony of the Holy Spirit through the Word, on the risen Christ who has declared Himself the resurrection and the life, and on the internal testimony of a God who has written the knowledge of Himself on our hearts. We must also believe, however, that this certainty does not exempt us from intellectual engagement with the questions our neighbors are asking. The God who exists is the God who commands us to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15), and the classical arguments are tools He has providentially given us for that task.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The doctrine of the *sensus divinitatis* should fill us with a particular kind of compassion for the unbeliever, not the condescension of those who possess knowledge toward those who lack it, but the sorrow of those who recognize that the person across from

them is actively fleeing the God he already knows. The atheist is not a person at peace; he is a person at war, at war with the knowledge that God has planted in his own soul. His very sophistication in the service of atheism is, on Paul's account, a measure of the energy required to suppress an inextinguishable light. Our response to this should be not intellectual triumph but pastoral intercession, and the faithful proclamation of a gospel that can do what no argument can: break through the suppression, illumine the darkened heart, and call the fleeing sinner home.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Know the arguments.** Every believer should have a working understanding of the four classical arguments for God's existence. You do not need a PhD in philosophy to deploy them; you need enough familiarity to introduce them into a conversation with an honest seeker or a thoughtful skeptic. Read and study them. They are among the most powerful intellectual tools in the church's apologetic arsenal.
2. **Understand the limits of the arguments.** The arguments establish the existence of a necessary Being, an intelligent Designer, a moral Lawgiver. They do not preach the gospel. In every apologetic conversation, the goal is not merely to win an argument about God's existence but to clear the ground for the proclamation of the specific, historical, saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Move toward the gospel; never rest short of it.
3. **Learn to expose suppression.** Romans 1 tells us that the unbeliever is not ignorant of God but is suppressing the knowledge of God. In apologetic conversations, learn to gently but persistently bring the weight of that suppressed knowledge to the surface, through questions about the origin of the universe, the basis of moral obligation, the meaning of human consciousness and rationality, pressing the implanted knowledge into the light where it cannot be so easily dismissed.
4. **Pray for those who deny God.** Behind every sophisticated atheist argument is a soul made in the image of God, bearing the *sensus divinitatis*, suppressing what it knows. Pray for those in your life who deny or doubt God's existence, not as those who have failed to find but as those who are fleeing, and ask God to do what no argument can do: break through the suppression with the irresistible light of His grace.
5. **Worship the God the arguments point to.** Every time you look at the night sky and feel the force of the teleological argument, let it carry you beyond the inference to the worship. Every time you feel the moral argument's weight, the certainty that some things are genuinely and timelessly wrong, let it drive you to the holy God whose character is the ground of that certainty. The arguments are signposts; they point to a Person who is worthy not merely of acknowledgment but of adoration.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: You may have friends or family members who challenge your faith with questions about the existence of God. This lesson gives you the tools to engage those questions with confidence and clarity. You do not have to choose between faith and reason; the God of the Bible is the God whose existence reason, rightly deployed, confirms.

For the parent: Teach your children not only that God exists but why we are confident He exists. Help them understand the classical arguments at an age-appropriate level so that when they encounter skepticism in the classroom or on social media, they have the intellectual resources to respond. And above all, teach them that our confidence rests not on philosophical argument alone but on the living Word and the indwelling Spirit of the God who has made Himself known to us in Christ.

For the apologist and evangelist: Paul's approach in Acts 17 is the model: begin where your audience is, acknowledge what they already know, press the knowledge of God they already possess into clearer articulation, and then move decisively to the gospel of the risen Christ. Do not get so absorbed in the philosophical arguments that you never arrive at the proclamation. The arguments are servants of the gospel, not substitutes for it.

For the one who is doubting: If you are wrestling with doubts about God's existence, know that those doubts do not disqualify you from faith or from this study. The classical arguments are there precisely for moments when the felt sense of God's reality is not as vivid as it once was. Use them. Engage them honestly. And then return to the primary instrument of all genuine knowledge of God: the Word of Scripture, through which the Spirit speaks, and which is the living voice of the God who is there, who has always been there, and who is not far from each one of us.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who denied God's existence or seriously doubted it? How did that conversation go? What arguments or approaches did you find most useful or most inadequate? Share briefly with the group.

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Romans 1:18–21. According to Paul, what is the relationship between the knowledge of God and the wrath of God? What does it mean that people “suppress” the truth? What is the consequence of this suppression described in verse 21?

3. Read Psalm 19:1–4. What specifically does creation “tell” and “declare” according to David? What is the significance of the paradox in verse 3 (“There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard”) immediately followed by the affirmation that their voice has gone out to all the earth?

4. Read Acts 17:22–31. Identify the points of contact Paul uses with his Athenian audience. At what point does Paul transition from general revelation to specific gospel proclamation? What is the content of that proclamation in verses 30–31?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. Explain the distinction between proving God's existence and demonstrating what is already known. How does the doctrine of the *sensus divinitatis* shape the apologetic task? What difference does it make to know that the unbeliever is suppressing knowledge rather than merely lacking it?

6. Summarize the cosmological argument in your own words. What is its strongest premise? What is its strongest conclusion? What does it establish, and what does it leave undetermined?

7. Summarize the moral argument in your own words. Why does the existence of objective moral obligations require a transcendent moral Lawgiver? How does Romans 2:14–15 provide the biblical grounding for the moral argument?

8. What are the limits of natural theology, according to this lesson? Why can the classical arguments not save? What can they do, and what must the gospel do that they cannot?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. Which of the four classical arguments do you find most personally compelling? Which do you find most useful in conversations with skeptics? Why?

10. Consider someone in your life who denies or seriously doubts God's existence. In light of Romans 1:18–21, how might you approach a conversation with that person?

differently than you have before? What suppressed knowledge might you gently surface?

11. Paul's approach in Acts 17 begins with common ground and moves to the gospel. What common ground do you share with the skeptics or seekers in your life? How might you use the classical arguments as bridges toward the proclamation of the specific gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?

12. Psalm 19 moves from the witness of creation (vv. 1–6) to the Word of God (vv. 7–14) as the superior instrument of the knowledge of God. In your own devotional life, how do you allow the created order to reinforce and deepen your theological knowledge? Do you have habits of attention to creation that might function as a regular, informal form of the teleological argument?

Prayer Focus

Spend time in prayer as a group thanking God for the staggering fact that He has made Himself known, not only in the grand theater of creation, where the heavens declare His glory and the fine-tuned constants of physics bear the signature of His wisdom, but supremely in the Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Himself the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). Thank Him that the knowledge of His existence is not a conclusion we had to labor to reach but a gift He has graciously inscribed on every human heart.

Intercede for the people in your lives who are suppressing the truth, the atheists, the agnostics, the spiritually indifferent, asking God to do what no argument can do: pierce through the suppression with the light of the gospel, open the eyes of their hearts, and call them to the knowledge of the God who is not far from each one of them. Pray for courage and clarity in your own witness, that you may be, like Paul on the Areopagus, those who name the Unknown God to a world that is groping for Him without knowing where to look.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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