



# REALITY OF GOD



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The Reality  
of God

The Bible

The Human  
Condition

Jesus  
Christ

Christian  
Faith

*BC* booklets are a series of brief studies by Dr. Glenn Parkinson examining the essentials of Biblical Christianity. These pamphlets are a series, meaning that each one builds upon the content of earlier ones. They do not have to read as a series, however. The reader should feel free to dip into the progression of thought at any point of interest.

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*... 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...*

Romans 1:19-20

Is the existence of God clearly evident to anyone who thoughtfully and openly looks at the universe? The Bible confidently asserts “yes.”

Of course, the Bible also declares a great deal about God which cannot be deduced from natural observation. This series of studies is ultimately concerned with the Christian faith, and nothing in the Bible leads us to expect scientific proofs for all of Christian theology. Faith in Christ will not come from a telescope or formula.

But every journey must begin somewhere. For some, the journey of the spirit begins with the question of God's very existence. I know, because that is where mine began.

If the reality of God is self-evident to you, this booklet will be of minimal interest. But if it is not, I would like to offer some thoughts about what can be observed concerning the existence and nature of God “from what has been made.” These thoughts revolve around two general categories of observation: the reality we sense in the universe at large and the reality we sense specifically within ourselves.

While the existence of God is often treated as an academic exercise, I realize that the subject is, in fact, intensely personal. I appreciate, therefore, the opportunity to address the subject with you.

## ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE

Virtually every observation a person can make of the natural world around us, from the most meticulous to the most casual, reveals astounding order. Complex but discernible structure marks everything from galactic swirls to microscopic crystals.

Order is most breathtakingly evident, however, in the phenomenon of life. Our efforts to describe the intricacies of the human brain are still primitive. Study of the DNA molecule reveals a truly astounding storehouse of information and design.

The sciences help to quantify observations about life with impressive numbers, or encapsulate them in beautiful models. But it only takes an ear to discover the summer ecosystem in the back yard, or an eye to appreciate the unique wonder of a human baby.

Sages of old mused that it would be as ludicrous to deny the existence of an intelligent Creator as it would be to find a pocket watch lying in the woods and then deny the existence of a watchmaker. If a watch could not “just happen” by itself, how could life? How could the entire orderly universe?

Today it is not so fashionable to speak of divine watchmakers. Today the fashion is rather to speak of evolution. Evidence has been put forth suggesting a universe appreciably older than suspected by our forefathers. It has been argued that life naturally evolved on its own over this long period of time.

As with any scientific theory, all the observations and conclusions supporting the popular notion of evolution are open to rational debate. Relevant issues include calculating the universe’s age, documenting the necessary transitional forms, demonstrating the viability of positive mutations, and so on.

For the purpose of this discussion, however, none of those issues is significant. For we are only addressing the reality of God, not His methods. That is, our concern is whether the universe we observe is the result of intelligent action from outside itself. The notion that the universe came into existence as a result of conscious purpose is called “intelligent design” theory. To focus on this core issue, let us simply assume that the universe is as old as evolutionists say it is, and that life has, indeed, become manifest in increasing complexity from the simplest to the more advanced forms.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of first importance is how all the order around us came to be. In the original and popular theory of evolution, order is thought to have happened entirely by random chance mutations, with the

more efficient mutations surviving. That is, minute and improbable accidents are thought to have accumulated over time, with natural selection causing these accidents to piggyback on one another in just the right way so as to eventually produce amino acids, cells, moss, insects, whales and eventually humans. If it is reasonable to assume that such order can come out of chaos all by itself, with chance as a necessary component, then there may be no compelling argument for a divine creative intelligence.

The theory of evolution has accumulated a large body of data to support its assertions concerning the age of the universe and the progression of life from simple to complex. None of this, however, demonstrates how such order came to be. Either the process has been intelligently guided from the outside, or it has not. Most who embrace and teach evolution believe it has not, and many of them communicate that belief as dogma whenever the subject is taught. As a result, most people today are under the impression that evolution's essential dependence upon random chance is part of its scientific approach to the subject.

It so happens, however, that there are branches of mathematics and physics devoted to the study of chance and the probabilities of random events in the real world. One of the fundamental conclusions of these studies is that things do not randomly tend to order themselves. Instead, things predictably tend to disorder themselves. (Which is more likely to happen when a small breeze enters the picture: a house of cards falling down in a scrambled heap, or a scattered heap of cards being blown into an orderly house?)

Most people, of course, do not make a scientific study of order and chaos. Evolutionists typically awe most of us away from questioning the theory's dependence on random events by touting the immensely long time since the universe began—several billion years. We all know enough about probability to know that an unlikely but possible event is more likely to occur as the amount of time increases. Billions of years sounds like a very long time, indeed. Outside of the sciences, people do not use “billion” to describe anything concrete except massive government spending, so the number seems overwhelming. “Yes,” we

think, “an accumulation of positive accidents is unlikely, but surely anything could spontaneously spring out of a universe so unthinkably old!”

The logic that drives confidence in evolution-by-chance is perfectly reflected in a well known statement commonly attributed to Thomas Huxley. He said that if a million monkeys were permitted to strike the keys of a million typewriters for a million years, they might very well by chance duplicate a Shakespearean play. Admittedly, human life is astronomically more complex than the proposed achievement of the monkeys, but the example serves to assert a principle: billions of years is enough time for anything to happen, no matter how unlikely. The argument sounds very convincing.

Well, if we simplify Huxley’s thought experiment a bit (giving the monkeys a break), we can actually calculate the time required for even such a simple example of “random order.” Let us give our budding authors typewriters with only capital letters, seven punctuation marks and a space key. We allow them to type twenty-four hours a day at the speed of twelve and a half keys per second. Instead of a Shakespearean play, the experiment only requires them to type the first verse of Genesis in English—not much of a challenge compared to the human nervous system, but Huxley was, after all, only trying to prove a point. To demonstrate just what point the monkeys actually prove, let me quote a biologist who applied some basic probability theory...

“The length of time it would take is indeed quite beyond our comprehension but an illustration may help. Think of a large mountain which is solid rock. Once a year a bird comes and rubs its beak on the mountain, wearing away an amount equivalent to the finest grain of sand (about .0025 inch in diameter). At this rate of erosion the mountain would disappear very slowly, but when completely gone the monkeys would still be just warming up.

“Think of a rock not the size of a mountain but a rock larger than the whole earth, larger than the whole solar system. Try to think of a rock so large that if the earth were at its center its surface would touch the nearest star. This star is so far away that light coming from it takes more than four years to get here, traveling 186,000 miles every second.

If a bird came once every thousand years and removed an amount equivalent to the smallest grain of sand, more than four hundred such rocks would be worn away before our champion super simians would be expected to type Genesis 1:1. If single spaced on one side of a page, the paper used in this typing would make a mass so large that something moving at the speed of light would take as long to penetrate it as all the time the geology books allow since the fossil record began.”<sup>2</sup>

Compared to this incomprehensible quantity of time, the mere billions of years claimed by evolutionists as the age of our universe is an insignificant micro-instant. If this is how long it would take for monkeys to randomly type the first verse of Genesis, then surely the time required to overcome the staggering improbabilities required to construct a DNA molecule is incalculable.

Arguments that the immense complexity of life was achieved by random chance, without any intelligent direction from outside, are naive in the extreme. Not only do they fly in the face of common sense, but they also fail to appreciate the size of the numbers involved in probabilities. The order we observe around us leaves no rational alternative but to assume that the process which formed it was intelligently driven, since intelligence is the only way we know to bring increasingly complex order out of chaos.

It is not intellectually defensible to claim that the ordered universe we see around us just happened by chance. When the facts become known, “random evolution” is exposed as just another form of blind faith, crossing the line from science into irrational bias. Perhaps people assert that life evolved by chance not because such a thing is even remotely likely, but rather because they have chosen to ignore a divine alternative out of personal prejudice.

If it is so obvious that the universe is intelligently driven, then the reality of God *is* evident from nature. We may not know much about this God, but we can be certain he exists because we see the result of his design.

Let me move on, if I may, from what we observe “out there” to something more intimate: what we observe within ourselves, within

our own conscious being. In doing so, I would like to take the liberty of shifting into a more personal mode of sharing ...

## THE PERSON INSIDE OF MYSELF

The reality of God was the last thing on my mind at 2 AM in the Computer Science building at the University of Maryland. A freshman in 1969, I was working on an assignment due for a computer programming class the next day.

The first year of college is a big event for anyone, but for me it meant fulfilling a quest already years old. Since childhood I had an unquenchable thirst for meaning. How did the universe come to be? What was life all about? I yearned to understand the grand design behind all things.

Although these are traditionally religious questions, I had no interest in religion. To me, religion was nothing more than subjective superstition, hardly to be taken seriously. It might have its social uses, but it had nothing to do with the substance of reality. Since divinity was supposed to be outside of the material universe, "God" was outside of all I considered to be real. All that existed was matter and energy in a completely closed system. No room for God there. No, I was certain that the answers to my questions were to be found in the sciences, not in religion.

Science had an almost mystical air about it when I was a kid growing up in the '50's. In those days, technology was the intellectually acceptable stage for any serious dialog about life. *Mr. Wizard* was my affectionate model of a wise mentor. Even in fiction, TV shows like *Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* often dealt with metaphysical concepts costumed as science, not religion or philosophy. I have particularly vivid memories of the 1964 World's Fair in New York, an audio-visual showcase for science that left a powerful impression upon me. Exalting mankind's scientific potential to epic proportions, it promised a technological answer to every significant question.

Science was the way to find objective beauty, order and meaning.

That is why I read every book on physical science in the Annapolis Public Library. When my parents casually asked me while driving one evening what I wanted to be when I grew up, I announced from the back seat, “I want to be a theoretical physicist majoring in quantum dynamics.” Quite a mouthful for a ten year old in 1960.

I finally made it to college in the pursuit of my dream, where I eventually earned a Phi Beta Kappa degree in physics. It was there, too, as a freshman that I experienced my first love affair—with computers. To think of all the secrets, all the meaning that could be uncovered with computers! These were the days before terminals, of course. Interaction was limited to keypunch machines and the stacks of cards they generated. But any access to those wonders of technology was treasured.

I confess that the love affair was strained, however, as I sat there at 2 AM striving to exterminate the last bugs from a frustrating assignment. As my eyes scanned the latest printout, I noticed that someone had tinkered with the computer’s operating system. Instead of reporting standard error messages, it dished out mild abuse: “Stupid!”, “Try again,” that sort of thing. I had stumbled on the work of one of the very first hackers!

I found the practical joke amusing and toyed absent-mindedly with how to imitate such mischief if given the chance. All I would have to do is locate the memory locations of the error messages. Then it would be a simple matter to replace ...

My thinking stopped dead in its tracks ....

If you have ever unexpectedly discovered a picture in a mass of ink blots or witnessed familiar forms appearing by themselves in a cloudy sky, you know how I felt at that moment. An insight materialized from nowhere—an insight that rocked my foundations and brought down everything I believed into ruin. In retrospect, I cannot explain why this truth never hit me before, but that night it hit me hard.

What I realized was that the computer didn’t mean what it said. It called me “stupid” instead of informing me that a variable had been undeclared, but it didn’t really think me stupid. It was merely executing a subroutine that responded to errors by taking whatever

was stored in a given memory location and printing it out on piece of paper. Anything stored in that location would be printed: “Undeclared variable”, “stupid”, “Error #1583”, “#@\*^&+”, “To be, or not to be”, whatever. The computer didn’t care or even understand what was there or what it printed.

Some person meant something. The original programmer intended to give a clue to assist in debugging; the more recent hacker intended to give a chuckle. But the computer was just a closed system of mere matter and energy. As such, its every action was completely determined in a mechanistic way and it was incapable of intending or meaning anything.

My mind had conceived of the whole universe as a closed system of only matter and energy—a super machine, if you will—like the computer, only larger. I was part of that system, a biochemical cog in the big machine.

At that moment, however, I was completely taken aback by the simple realization that if my assumptions about reality were true, then the idea of “meaning” was meaningless, an illusion with no real substance.

If my assumptions were true, then my mind was running its program as mechanistically as the university’s computer. The Univac 1108 didn’t know proper computing from a practical joke. If my thoughts at that moment were nothing more than a memory dump of selected brain cells, how did I know that they made any sense? How could I know whether my electrical and neural patterns were what they were supposed to be? Who could determine what they are *supposed* to be? Whether my thoughts reflected a true or false equation, affection or hatred, poetry or gibberish—whatever they were, they could have no more meaning than the college computer’s mindless comment that I was stupid.

What difference can it make whether a biological computer spits out “I love you” or “Lynch him!” or “gorphmxyql”? There is absolutely no objective meaning, purpose or value in the bare existence of matter and energy. A machine can process data, but it cannot create any true, objective meaning out of its data.

Significance, purpose, meaning—these are ideas associated with *persons*, not machines. The classic concept of a soul transcends the machinery of matter and energy to find real purpose and value on another level of being. True, the internal world of personhood is experienced differently than the external world conveyed to us by the physical senses. The soul is not so easily measured and quantified. But if we must necessarily rely on our inner consciousness to interpret our senses, then we must also take the soul seriously when it is aware of itself.

To be sure, the idea of personhood creates its own set of questions and problems, as complex and mysterious as any in physics or astronomy. But at least persons can have meaningful questions and seek meaningful answers about anything; machines cannot.

Machines cannot create meaning because they are completely controlled by physical forces which, while they may be consistent, have no intrinsic purpose. Random interactions of these forces in larger and larger systems increases complexity, but gains no purpose. Purpose has to be given to machines by a person. A giant supercomputer may work on projects of great importance, but the importance of its work is defined by its human programmers. If the programmers went away and never came back, the supercomputer would lose all significance, even if it continued to rerun the same programs until it melted down. Machines mean nothing without the “why” supplied by a person.

Unless there is a person inside of me to give the “why” to my actions and define my purpose, none of my thoughts and actions could have any meaning whatsoever.

You see what a bombshell had exploded in my face. That night, I suddenly realized that in a world based on my thoroughly mechanistic presuppositions, there was no room for real persons. Not one. Not even me. I believe there can be no turning back once you realize this. You either keep your presuppositions and give up your humanity, or you affirm your humanity and change your presuppositions. Either there is more to reality than impersonal laws of nature, or reality has no room for human significance—no room for me in any meaningful sense. It is that simple.

That night, my universe changed. I looked at my naturalistic world-view and heard myself saying, “I don’t believe that.” Without being aware of it, I had already risen from my chair. I left the programming workroom and walked back to the dorm, realizing that my entire understanding of life had undergone a major shift. As yet, there was no thought of religion, but I now recognized that the universe was a much richer place than I had imagined.

The next obvious question was not far behind. How did persons like myself come to be? A machine could perhaps build another machine, but only a person could account for other persons.

Years later, I heard an analogy by Francis Schaeffer that described the simple truth I was grappling with. He pictured three mountain ranges with two valleys separating them. Imagine, he said, that one valley was filled halfway up the slopes with water. As you watch, you see water begin to fill the other valley. If the water in the second valley stops rising at the height of the water in the first valley, then you would suspect that a channel connects the two, and that the first body of water is the source, or cause, of the second. But if the water in the second valley rises higher than the water level in the first, you would discount the possibility of a connecting channel. In that case, the first valley could not possibly provide an adequate source for the other valley’s water.

The point was obvious: every effect needs a sufficient cause. If humanity is not merely a biological mechanism, if real persons exist, then there must be an adequate personal cause. The water level of personhood is considerably higher than the water level of biological machinery. Where is the source for personhood? There must be a Person behind all the persons like myself.

It seems, then, that what I observe inside myself builds on what I observe in the outside world. The order I see around me demonstrates a powerful, intelligent Cause, while my own conscious existence clearly demonstrates that the intelligence that established this order is thoroughly personal—a Person we call God.<sup>3</sup>

Do not suppose that this discovery was accompanied by some kind of spontaneous religious joy. I still did not trust any religion. In fact, I now had a great many more questions than ever, and some of them were quite disturbing.

The very first question, however, is simply the reality of God. All I wish to do here is to point out the single observation that changed my life and eventually brought me into contact with my Creator...

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Simply put, either God exists or you and I don't. Either there is a cause for personhood, meaning, significance and value, or none of those things exists. They would be mere illusions fabricated by people-machines who through blind evolutionary chance have imagined themselves able to dream of significance.

Perhaps, like me, you have been used to brushing off the concept of God as one of the world's superstitions. Perhaps you believe God is only a concept created by people who emotionally need such a foundation. But emotional need (however real) has nothing to do with it. Intellectually, I must either recognize the existence of a personal God or give up everything that makes me human.

But I realized that it was impossible for me to give up everything that makes me human and still go on living. I simply could not imagine living with no values or purpose whatever, as if nothing truly mattered. Yet, if there is no God, then nothing can matter, nothing at all. If there is no God, then mankind (including you and me) is nothing but a shimmer of cosmic dust destined for oblivion.

I once heard a joke about a group of people listening to a science lecture. The lecturer had just mentioned our Sun's predicted demise several billion years from now, taking with it the possibility of life on this planet. Suddenly an agitated hand went up from the back of the crowd. "Excuse me, sir, how long did you say we have until the Sun dies?" "Several billion years," was the reply. "Whew!" replied the relieved listener. "I thought you said several *million!*"

In the larger scheme of things, what difference does it really make whether mankind perishes in several billion or several million years? Whether you die in 20 or 40 years? Whether any of us ever existed in the first place? If there is no God, then there is not even anything meaningfully alive which can die.

One may claim that there is no God, all the while buying milk and getting the car fixed and writing congressmen about environmental problems. But without God, why would any of those things matter? Without the Person of God to give me meaning, I do not need milk to stay alive, or a car to keep a job, or a congressman to worry about an environment that has no more significance than I do.

I began to realize that being involved in the business of living proved that I did not really believe the implications of the atheistic philosophy I affirmed. I could propose the intellectual fiction of meaninglessness, but I could never approach actually living that way.

The fact that we go on living as if life had meaning proves beyond any doubt that we know life has purpose. We might live in agony, not knowing what that purpose is, but we know we exist for some reason. Even the existentialist who grieves over the absurdity of life does so with a passion and eloquence that demonstrates the true humanity he or she denies. We can't escape it. Even suicide is a purposeful act betraying a person's confidence that he or she can do something meaningful. Even the act of passionately denying God's existence assumes a personal significance and capacity for meaning that demands his existence.

This comes as quite a shock to atheists such as I was. Atheists intellectually deny God's existence and therefore reject any ground for real meaning in the universe. But I now realized that I had been fooling myself, since I had never lived that way and never would.

But *why* did I go to such lengths to fool myself? Did I really think that God did not exist, or was I simply afraid of how inconvenient he might be? After all, God's existence would certainly raise a lot of difficult, and potentially embarrassing questions.

I made the startling discovery that my atheism was not, at root, an intellectual issue. It was a moral one, having more to do with my integrity. Earlier I said, "Perhaps people assert that life evolved by

chance not because such a thing is even remotely likely, but rather because they have chosen to ignore a divine alternative out of personal prejudice.” That night in the Computer Science Center, I began to realize that this prejudice was at work in me. But why was I so resistant to thinking about God objectively?

Let me go back to the Bible passage I quoted at the beginning, this time drawing attention to its context ...

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men 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 are without excuse.*     Romans 1:18-20

It is true. God's existence is, indeed, perfectly obvious in his creation, whether I look at the world around me or the person inside of me. The reason I could not see that for so long was that I did not want to see it. I suppressed the truth, unconsciously, but firmly. The existence of God certainly complicates a life that wishes to be independent, and I had feared that complication. I internally denied the truth so effectively that I had convinced myself that my atheism was rational.

But no matter how much I wanted the independence of atheism, I could never live as though my thoughts were nothing more than the purposeless product of random atomic collisions. I could pretend otherwise, but I could never actually live as if I were just part of a big galactic machine, my personhood a mechanical illusion with no actual reality. I could express such thoughts, but I could never truly believe them—my life proves it. All our lives prove it. We cannot escape the truth that God exists; all we can do is suppress it.

In summary, we perceive an overwhelming order around us and have an innate sense of personhood within us that cannot be accounted for without an intelligent and personal Creator God. Either we deny God and deny ourselves, or we affirm what we see and affirm God.

I appreciate the fact that recognizing the existence of God creates a host of other questions, for now comes the uncomfortable thought that I must deal with this God. Why have I suppressed the obvious truth of his being? Is there something wrong with God? Is there something wrong with me?

Even more disturbing, why is the world such a mess? If God can be known through what he has made, then what does this broken and hurting planet say about him? Is God the Devil?

And if God is a person, why do I not know him? Why don't we communicate? Why hasn't God spoken? Or has he?

Good questions! But they are good questions only because a personal God must exist. And if he exists, then perhaps we can find some real answers...

### (Endnotes)

- 1 Many Christians, incidentally, believe that both these notions are quite consistent with the Bible. We will, at any rate, simply assume them for the sake of argument.
- 2 This illustration is from Bolton Davidheiser, who holds a doctorate in biology from Johns Hopkins. He took the mathematics from *An Introduction to Probability Theory and Its Implications*, by William Feller, New York: Wiley, 1950, I, 226.
- 3 I suppose to be technically accurate, we must say that God is *at least* a person. That is, he has at least the personal abilities we possess: thought, emotion, volition, and the like. It may be, of course, that God is much more than a person, possessing qualities which we are incapable of appreciating any more than a tree can appreciate calculus. Be that as it may, it is perfectly clear from looking at the part of creation called "us" that God is at minimum a thoroughly personal being, as we understand personhood.



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