

Lesson One

WHY WE BELIEVE IN GOD

Scripture Reading: Psalm 100.

Scriptures To Memorize: "The fool hath said within his heart, There is no God" (Psa. 14:1). "Know ye that Jehovah, he is God; it is he that hath made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psa. 100:3).

TO INTRODUCE THE LESSON, ask your pupils this question: If you were asked by an unbeliever to state the reasons why you believe that there is a God, how would you reply? What reasons would you give? Insist upon your pupils answering this question in their own words, and thus ascertain how much thought they have given it. You may be surprised to find that the children have clearer ideas of God than the grown-ups.

1. Q. How is the Christian creed stated in the Scriptures?
 - A. It is stated thus: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).
2. Q. What must one believe in order to become a Christian?
 - A. One must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

John 20:30, 31—"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." Acts 16:31—"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10:9, 10—"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

3. Q. What is clearly implied in this creedal formula?
 - A. That in order to Divine Sonship there must be Divine Fatherhood.

4. Q. What does Jesus teach in regard to this matter?
A. He says: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).
5. Q. What is the first truth of true religion?
A. The first truth of true religion is God.
6. Q. Why is God the first truth of true religion?
A. Because all other truths, and in fact true religion itself, rest upon God, His being, His attributes and His works.
7. Q. What is the first argument for our belief that there is a God?
A. It is called the Argument from Design.
8. Q. What is this Argument from Design?
A. It is that design implies a designer; hence the design of the world around us and within us implies a Divine Designer or Supreme Architect.

(1) Take, for illustration, a building. Ask your pupils to specify the biggest building they have ever seen. Ask if they can remember the time when it did not exist as a building. In what form did it exist before it became a building? The answer is obvious: it must have existed in the mind and plan of the person who conceived and designed it. Everything in our human experience exists first in dream, vision or plan, before it becomes in reality the thing it is designed to be. This is true of the dress you wear, the dinner you serve, the home you build, etc. A building presupposes a builder, design necessitates a designer.

(2) The idea of design includes not only the structure and arrangement of the thing designed, but also its functions and uses. Paley's illustration of a watch and its uses is, though old, quite simple and sound. The design in a watch is obvious. But before there was a watch, there must have been a watch-maker; and the watch-maker must not only have designed and arranged its parts to serve the purpose for which the instrument was constructed, viz., to keep time accurately. Design therefore includes both the structure and the functions of the thing designed.

(3) It is equally clear, too, that the builder must antedate

the building. This being true, the Supreme Architect must have antedated His creation.

(4) For another illustration, take the human body. It is a perfect mechanism. It is more—it is a vitalized mechanism. Call attention to the inter-relations of bone, muscle, blood, organs, etc., each discharging its particular function, and the whole welded together and inhabited by a unifying entity called spirit. To think for one moment that nature could have produced this living mechanism by any operation of "resident forces" is, to say the least, absurd. Suggest the idea that the body is the building in which the real self dwells, i.e., your body is merely the tabernacle in which the real you resides. 2 Cor. 5:1—"the earthly house of this tabernacle." 1 Cor. 6:19—"your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit which is in you," says Paul, writing to Christians. We want to keep our houses clean and wholesome and fit to live in, do we not? Then should we not keep our bodies equally clean and wholesome?

(5) The world in which we live is a vast building roofed by space. Consider the design prevailing throughout this vast material universe! Planets revolving in certain orbits, the earth rotating on its axis, with unbroken regularity. Nature is a cosmos, not a chaos. (Ask the students to tell what they think and know about the stars. Cultivate their appreciation of the beauty and glory of the heavens, of the beauty of a landscape, especially its coloring in the autumn, etc. Students enjoy talking about such things). Everything in this world is cause and effect, and design. Order is nature's first law. No intelligent person can for a minute think that all this design is the work of chance. Besides, what is meant by "chance?"—who can define the term? As Fred Emerson Brooks has written in his poem, *The Grave Digger*,

"If chance could fashion but one little flower,
 With perfume for each tiny leaf,
 And furnish it with sunshine and with shower—
 Then chance would be Creator, with the power
 To build a world for unbelief."

We cannot for one moment think, however, that the orderliness of seedtime and harvest, of summer and winter,

of day and night, of cause and effect, etc., is the consequence of any operation of chance. Everything in our material world indicates design.

(6) This design, moreover, is universal. It is everywhere, both around us and within us. Thus two atoms of hydrogen combine with one of oxygen, no more, no less, to form a particle of water. Even the abnormalities of nature, such as cyclones, earthquakes, pestilences, etc., all have their respective causes. Dr. A. H. Strong points out that it is "a working-principle of all science . . . that all things have their uses, that order pervades the universe, and that the methods of nature are rational methods." He adds: "Evidences of this appear in the correlation of the chemical elements to each other; in the fitness of the inanimate world to be the basis and support of life; in the typical forms and unity of plan apparent in the organic creation; in the existence and cooperation of natural laws; in cosmical order and compensations" (Systematic Theology, p.77). Why should materialists say: The more law, the less God? Why is it not more rational to say: The more law, the greater the evidence of God. Frances Power Cobbe says: "It is a singular fact that, whenever we find out how a thing is done, our first conclusion seems to be that God did not do it." Such a process of reasoning is, however, wholly irrational; it preceeds from a heart filled with unbelief. We agree with Henry Ward Beecher that "design by wholesale is greater than design by retail." We accept the universality of design as a positive proof of the immanence of God.

(7) We conclude therefore, that before this world could have existed in fact, it must have been designed, planned and created is evident in it, His footprints are everywhere upon it, His Spirit permeates the whole. Even Herbert Spencer admits: "One truth must ever grow clearer — the truth that there is an inscrutable existence everywhere manifested, to which we can neither find nor conceive beginning or end—the one absolute certainty that we are ever in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things preceed." And Shelley, who wrote his name in the visitors' book of the inn at Montanvert, and added: "Democrat, philanthropist, atheist;" yet loved to think of a "fine

intellectual spirit pervading the universe." And Charles Darwin, founder of the evolutionary hypothesis, wrote: "In my most extreme fluctuations, I have never been an atheist, in the sense of denying the existence of a God" (Life, 1:274). No one can intelligently and profoundly contemplate the world around us and within us without admitting the fact of God. Gen. 1:1—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Psa. 19:1—"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." Heb. 1:10—"Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands" (Cf. Psa. 102:25).

9. Q. What is the second argument for our belief that there is a God?

A. It is called the Argument from Intuition.

10. Q. What is the Argument from Intuition?

A. It is that the intuition of a Supreme Being is so well-nigh universal among men, we can only conclude that it has its origin and foundation in fact.

(1) Man is universally endowed with religious intuitions and aspirations, all of which point unmistakably to a Supreme Being who is able to supply all his spiritual needs. Religious intuitions common to all races are: a sense of sin and loss; a desire for prayer and worship; a feeling of need of salvation; and a longing for and expectation of life beyond the grave. "However fallen and degraded, there is something within man which reaches after God, and a piteous voice that cries to the unseen for help" (M. M. Davis, *How To Be Saved*, p.20). (2) All peoples have their belief in God, no matter how depraved their conceptions of His nature. The Vedas declare: "There is but one Being—no second." Back of all the mythological systems of the Greeks and other ancients, as their foundation and support, was belief in the Supreme All-Father. "The lowest tribes have conscience, fear death, believe in witches, propitiate or frighten away evil fates. Even the fetich-worshiper, who calls the stone or the tree a god, shows that he has already the idea of a God" (Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 56).

Sir Charles Lyell writes: "The presumption is enormous that all our faculties, though liable to err, are true in the main and point to real objects. The religious faculty in man is one of the strongest of all. It existed in the earliest ages, and instead of wearing out before advancing civilization, it grows stronger and stronger, and is today more developed among the highest races than it ever was before. I think we may safely trust that it points to a great truth."

(3) We can neither assume nor recognize the finite as finite, except by comparison with the Infinite. As Victor Hugo says: "Some men deny the Infinite; some, too, deny the sun; they are the blind." "Even the Nihilists, whose first principle is that God and duty are great bugbears to be abolished, assume that God and duty exist, and they are impelled by a sense of duty to abolish them" (Culter, *Beginnings of Ethics*, p. 22). "Blind unbelief is sure to err," writes Cowper. Of course. It errs because it is blind.

(4) All peoples have their conceptions of a future life, too. To the Greeks, it was Elysium; to the Teutons, Valhalla; to the American Indian, "the happy hunting-ground." To the Hebrews, its glories were revealed and expressed in the beautiful word, Paradise. To us it is revealed as Heaven. Have these intuitions been implanted within us merely that we may in the end find ourselves disillusioned and mocked? Does a cruel Satirist sit upon the throne of the universe? A thousand times—No!! (5) We can arrive at but one conclusion, therefore, viz., that the intuition of a Supreme Being upon whom men everywhere more or less conceive themselves to be dependent, is so universal it can be accounted for only on the ground that it was originally implanted in the very nature of man, by the Creator Himself.

11. Q. What is the third argument for our belief that there is a God?

A. It is called the Argument from Experience.

12. Q. What is the Argument from Experience?

A. It is the argument derived from the testimony of righteous persons who claim to have personally experienced fellowship with God and to have tasted of the benefits and blessings of His grace.

(1) Faith "gives us understanding of realities which to sense alone are inaccessible, namely, God's existence, and some at least of the relations between God and His creation" (Strong, *ibid.*, p. 4). Faith is, therefore, the highest form of knowledge. It is the insight of the two eyes of the heart—understanding and love. Pascal: "We know truth, not only by the reason, but by the heart . . . The heart has its reasons, which the reason knows nothing of." Emerson: "Belief consists in accepting the affirmation of the soul—unbelief in rejecting them" (Essays). Heb. 11:3—"by faith we understand," etc. 2 Tim. 1:12—"for I know him whom I have believed." 1 John 3:2—"We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him," etc. (2) "The errors of the rationalist are errors of defective vision. Intellect has been divorced from heart, that is, from a right disposition, right affections, right purpose in life. Intellect says: 'I cannot know God;' and intellect is right. What intellect says, the Scripture also says" (Strong, *ibid.*, p. 4). 1 Cor. 2:14—"Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him," etc. 1 Cor. 1:21—"in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God," etc. (3) "As in conscience we recognize an invisible authority, and know the truth just in proportion to our willingness to 'do the truth,' so in religion only holiness can understand holiness, and only love can understand love" (Strong, *ibid.*, p. 5). Psa. 34:8—"O taste and see that Jehovah is good: blessed is the man that taketh refuge in him." John 3:21—"he that doeth the truth cometh to the light." John 7:17—"If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself." (4) The noblest affirmations of God have their foundation in true religious experience. Consider the experience of thousands who have testified that they cried out unto God and found Him; that their petitions were heard and answered; that their spiritual aspirations were realized through repentance, prayer, meditation, worship and sacrificial service. Dare we be so irreverent as to call this "superstition?" For illustration, the experience of David, and that of Paul. The "Confessions" of Augustine. (5) Develop the thought with your pupils of

a personal intimacy with God. Do you pray? Do you give thanks at the table? Do you know that God answers prayer? Even when as a child you lisped, "Now I lay me down to sleep," etc., you prayed to Someone—to a Person who could hear and understand and respond — did you not? Teach the children to pray unselfishly—not for a new dress, or new toy, etc. Teach them that they can come to God at any time if they approach Him "in Jesus' name."

13. Q. What fundamental conviction do we reach at this point in our study?

A. We reach the conviction that there is no rational explanation of the world, nor of man, nor of personality, without a living God.

Unbelief is highly irrational. The only true rationalism is Christian faith. John 14:1—"ye believe in God, believe also in me."

14. Q. What practical lesson should we derive from these truths?

A. That one who says within his heart, There is no God, is a fool. *Psa. 14:1.*

Likewise, one who lives as if there were no God is also a fool. Atheism, whether of the intellect or of the life, is folly. Unbelief and irreligiousness are but forms of insanity.

REVIEW EXAMINATION OVER LESSON ONE

1. Q. How is the Christian creed stated in the Scriptures?
2. Q. What must one believe in order to become a Christian?
3. Q. What is clearly implied in this creedal formula?
4. Q. What does Jesus teach in regard to this matter?
5. Q. What is the first truth of true religion?
6. Q. Why is God the first truth of true religion?
7. Q. What is the first argument for our belief that there is a God?
8. Q. What is this Argument from Design?
9. Q. What is the second argument for our belief that there is a God?
10. Q. What is the Argument from Intuition?

11. Q. What is the third argument for our belief that there is a God?
12. Q. What is the Argument from Experience?
13. Q. What fundamental conviction do we reach at this point in our study?
14. Q. What practical lesson should we derive from these truths?

Lesson Two

THREE COMMONPLACE PROOFS OF GOD

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19.

Scriptures To Memorize: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psa. 19:1). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

TO INTRODUCE THIS LESSON, explain that by commonplace we mean common to our everyday experience. Jesus made use of commonplace things to enforce the most profound spiritual truths, as, e. g., the lily of the field, the sower who went forth so sow, the shepherd and the sheep, the vine and its branches, etc. Following His method of teaching, we call attention here to three commonplace evidences of God in the world which are incidental to our everyday experience, so much so in fact that we are prone to overlook their eternal significance.

15. Q. What is one commonplace proof of God?
A. Life.
16. Q. How does life prove that there is a God?
A. Life is itself proof of the Divine Life-giver.

(1) "One of the most deeply suggestive events in nature is the reawakening of life in the springtime, with the sense of fresh beauty and newness of being which it brings" (H. W. Dresser, *The Philosophy of the Spirit*, p. 1). What is this oft-recurring miracle but another of the many "renewings" of the Divine Spirit?