



**This is Richard Dawkins.** He is one of the most well-known prominent atheists and scientists in the world. Some years ago he wrote a book called the god delusion which sold millions of copies all around the world and was translated in over 30 different languages. And a famous quote from his book is the following:

*The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction. He is jealous and proud of it. He is a vindictive bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, fetocidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, stomasticistic, capriciously malevolent bully.*

What do you think? Suffice it to say that he just said a lot of really nasty things about the God that you and I worship. But the next question would be, how would you respond to something like that? Because I can assure you that regardless of your vocation, what you do, wherever your children, grandchildren, friends, or relatives go to school, our culture, we live in a culture that is shaped and influenced by voices like him. And so my next question is, how would you respond to something like that? And while we're not going to go into responses to Dawkins's accusations against God, **a great book I'd recommend** is by Paul Copen called "*Is God a Moral Monster?*" where he addresses these claims that that Dawkins makes.

But I bring this up because I'm reminded of a verse. **Matthew 5:13**, Jesus says something interesting. He says, **"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its purpose and function, it is not good for anything but to be thrown out and walked on by people."** Now, to understand briefly what He's getting at, you have to first understand what was the purpose of salt in these ancient times. And suffice it to say that back then they didn't have the technology we do. They didn't have refrigerators. So what they would do is instead they would take salt and they would apply it to meat. The salt acted as a preservative to keep meat from spoiling. So with this historical context in mind, we can look at the illustration Christ is giving and then we can ask this question, "who is a salt represented in the analogy?" and "who would that be?" Well, the salt us: you, me, we, the body of Christ. We are the salt of the earth. And given the historical context, what would the meat represent in the analogy? Well, that would be the world, the culture that we live in.

This raises the first question. Ask yourself, is the meat going bad today? My goodness, yes. Turn on the news, look at social media. Clearly, the meat is going bad. But now, understand

the implicit point Christ is making here. And here's what He's saying. To understand this, imagine if you will, we lived in biblical times and we go to the local market and we buy a bag of salt. Imagine you apply the salt to various pieces of meat. But suppose after a few days, you notice something odd. You notice that no matter how much salt you add or what type of meat it is, the meat continues to perish and spoil and rot just as it normally would, as if it had no salt to begin with. And if this continues to happen, then the point that Christ is trying to make is simply this: there's going to come a time where you're going to have to step back and not ask what's wrong with the meat, but at some point you're going to have to be honest with yourself and ask what is wrong with the salt. Because you are the salt of the earth. And if the meat goes bad, Jesus does not point at the meat. He looks at the salt.

People often ask me, "What is apologetics?" We're going to go through some verses briefly, but I say the best way to explain this is to allow me to ask you two questions and then allow me to respond as an atheist or skeptic. And here are the two questions:

**The first is "why are you a Christian?"** Just reflect on that for a moment. Why are you a Christian? If someone were to ask you that, how would you answer? **And the second is "why should someone else be a Christian?"** What I often find is someone's answer to the first question doesn't necessarily apply to the second.

To illustrate this, I was once invited years ago before I was with Texas Baptist to a men's conference to be one of the speakers. And I arrive at the conference early. I go backstage to, you know, sit with the other speakers. And as I'm just kind of, you know, talking with some of the other guys, the keynote speaker that evening who was a pastor approached me in a kind of condescending tone and said, "Oh, so you do apologetics, right?" I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, you know what they say, a man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you see, I have my own testimony of how God changed my life. So, I don't need apologetics to defend my faith. You see, I was addicted to drugs. I was in gangs. I was violent. I was going through a divorce. I was an alcoholic. But the one true God changed my life. And so, again, I don't need apologetics to defend my faith when I have my testimony." My first thought was, "why is this pastor trying to argue with me right before we're about to preach on stage together?" And I said, "Well, pastor, if I could just set aside the fact that you're essentially giving me an argument as to why we shouldn't use arguments. If I could just set that aside for a second, let me ask, does your church ever do evangelism?" He said, "Oh, yeah." I said, "What do you guys do?" He said, "Well, once a month we go to these apartments near our church, and we set up a station. We cook hot dogs and hamburgers, and we interact with the community. Some of us even play basketball with the kids. Then I get up with a microphone to share my testimony and I do this all without apologetics." I said, "Okay. Well,

let me ask you a hypothetical about what you just said. So, your church goes for lunch, right? Let's suppose, I don't know, four or five hours later, it's dinner time and a different religious group comes and let's say they're Muslim. And so they go to the same apartment complex that you just left and they go to the same area and they set up a station and they cook hot dogs and hamburgers and they interact with the community and some of them even play basketball with the kids. But then suppose one of their religious leaders, who again is Muslim, stands up to share his testimony. Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that his testimony was like, I don't know, 10 times better than your testimony. So let's, for example, that he was in 10 different gangs, addicted to 10 different types of drugs, had 10 bottles of alcohol at his house, was prone to 10 different types of violence, and was going through 10 different divorces simultaneously all at once because, you know, in Islam, you can have more than one wife, right? But he leans into the microphone and says, 'But the one true God, Allah, changed my life.' Now pastor earlier you told me that a man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument. So based on this Muslim's testimony, which, according to you, no one can argue against, would you then drop to your knees, devote your life to Allah and become a Muslim?" And he said, "No! Of course I wouldn't." I said, "Right! That's kind of my point."

Let's look at this biblically. Scripture says that the preaching of the cross is power to those who believe. That is, you and I. But it is foolishness to those who don't. So our job then is this: How do we take what the world deems as foolishness to translate that and demonstrate its power? Well, I submit to you that is in part the discipline and task of apologetics.

**Scripture tells us in 1 Peter 3:15**, it says, "**Set Christ apart in your heart as Lord**" And then it says something interesting, "**...and always be ready to give a logical defense or answer to anyone who asks for the hope that is in you.**"

**And if you were to look up that word "defense,"** you would find the Greek word **apologia**. We have transliterated that to **the English word apologetics**. And hence we can say that biblically speaking, **apologetics can be defined as giving a defense for what we believe and why we believe it.**

I want you to note that this is a New Testament commandment to New Testament believers. Which means if you're a Christian here this morning, you are commanded by God, not suggested. It is a command to every person to be ready to give an answer, a defense, an unapologetic for why you believe what you believe. Or if I can put it a little bit more bluntly, this means if we are believers here this morning and we understand this verse yet we do not engage in this discipline, then we are in biblical rebellion and disobedience to the word of God. And if people take issue with that, I like to remind them, look, I didn't write

the book, I just read it. So you can take it up with the author, but this is what scripture is commanding us to do, to be ready to give an answer defense.

And let me explain why this is so important, especially in our day and age. I was invited years ago to speak to this youth group. The pastor wants to have lunch with me before the service. And as we're eating, he says, "Eric, I think apologetics is neat and all, but I just don't think it has a place behind the pulpit, and certainly not for Sunday morning service like we're doing here this morning." I didn't want to argue with the pastor whose church I'm about to preach at. So I said, "Well, we can agree to disagree." Youth service begins and the youth pastor invites me up and says, "Take a few minutes just to introduce yourself before you start preaching. Let the kids know who you are." Well, out of respect for the pastor, I didn't want to go deeply into apologetics. So, I just gave the verse, gave a definition, and then I told the students, "But hey, if you have questions, see me after the service and we can talk."

As I get off stage to gather my things, I notice under the corner of my eye, there's this young man and his mother standing right here waiting for me. And as soon as I get to my seat, they run right up towards me. The young man looks at me, then points at her and says, "Tell her you said we could ask you questions, right?" And I thought, "My goodness, I'm trying to replay the sermon into my mind, thinking, did I say something wrong or inappropriate?" And the mother looks at me and looks at him and shrugs her shoulders and says, "Well, as long as it's okay with you, I'll let him talk." And she walked off. Confused by this, I said, "What was that about? Is everything okay?" And what he said still, to this day, shatters my heart. He said, "Well, I'm an atheist. I don't want to come to church, but my mom forces me to come, so I come. But I've always had questions. And as I begin to ask these questions to those in my youth group, they couldn't give me an answer. And so they told me, 'Go talk to the youth pastor.' He couldn't give me an answer. They said, 'Go talk to the pastor.' And it got to the point to where one day they approached me after service and they said, 'Look, if you're going to come to church, that's fine, but you're going to have to just sit down, shut up, and stop bothering people with your questions.'" But then he looked at me and said, "But that rule doesn't apply to you because you don't come here. And so, if you don't mind, can I ask you some questions because you said we could ask you questions, right?"

We talked for at least an hour. So long that that the person with the keys to the church said, "You have to leave. I've got to go home." And as I'm walking to my car, he's still asking questions. Great questions. Sharp kid. And I'm realizing I need more time with him. I ask him, "Does this make sense?" He said, "Yes, I've never heard this before." And as I'm answering his questions and I said, "Look, if you'd like, I can talk with the pastor and maybe

we can continue this conversation over the phone or through email." And he said, "That would be so great. It's been a while since I've been able to ask questions."

Over breakfast, I wasted no time with the pastor. I said, "Pastor, I know what you said about apologetics, but you realize you have an atheist in your youth group, right?" And he said, "Yeah, that's so and so. We're praying for him. And I said, you know, it's going to take more than that, right? Look, this is a 17-year-old young man, only a junior in high school in small town in Texas. I encourage you to reconsider your view on this because I can assure you that if you lose this kid, he could easily take half this group with him. I handed him my card and continued, "Nevertheless, out of respect for you, I didn't want to give him my card, but if you're okay with it, here is my personal selling email. Would you give this to him so we can continue that conversation?" That was over 10 years ago, and within those 10 years, I doubt that kid ever got my card because I never heard from the him again.

If you're taking notes, I want you to write down the word stronghold. **And go with me to 2 Corinthians 10:4-5**. And here's when I want to spend the rest of my time. What we see here is Paul gives us some insight into the discipline and task of spiritual warfare. And what he essentially says is that a task of spiritual warfare is to demolish strongholds. Well, what's a stronghold?

Rather than guess, **he defines it in the next verse**. And he says that we destroy and tear down arguments, reasonings, every high and proud thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Which means biblically speaking, **a stronghold can be defined as** thoughts, ideas, any false belief or set of beliefs that hinder someone from coming to a salvific knowledge of God. **And this is quite literally the spiritual warfare within our culture because a person cannot come to a knowledge or deeper knowledge of God with such strongholds.**

And so to recap, we have already seen biblically that: one, you are the salt of the earth. You are commanded to preserve the meat. Two, you are commanded by God, not suggested, to be ready to give an answer, a defense, an apologetic for what you believe and why you believe it. And now we see that as a believer in our culture, you are supposed to be equipped to be able to identify and tear down these strongholds within our culture. Which means if you want to be effective in evangelism, if you want to be effective in spiritual warfare, if you want to be effective in discipleship, and if you want to be an ambassador for Christ, then biblically speaking, it's going to require the discipline and task of apologetics according to scripture.

And with this in mind, **I want to briefly mention the three dominant strongholds within our culture today**. I want to first go over how we identify them and then after that, how to

respond to them. In my book, I have two chapters on each of these, one for identifying, one for responding. But we're just going to briefly touch the surface.

The first one is known as **postmodernism** or **relativism**. And it's essentially **the idea that truth is relative. There is no right or wrong. There is no absolute truth**. In fact, you may hear people say something like this. They'll say, "Look, if you want me to, let's say, be against same-sex marriage." Well, look, that's fine. If you don't believe that, but that's your truth and not mine. And if you're against abortion, well, that's fine, too. If you're a man, you can't say nothing about it. But don't tell this young lady she can't do what she wants with her body because it's your truth and not hers. True for you, but not for me. And mind you, these are not political issues. These are moral issues that have been politicized. But yet with postmodernism, truth is relative to your perspective.

The next one is known as **scientism**. **Note the -ism. It is essentially the idea that the only way to gain knowledge is through science**. And so a person who holds to this worldview or stronghold may say something like this. **If it cannot be scientifically proven, then it cannot be known or cannot be true**. And so you want me to believe in God or an afterlife? Well, show me the scientific evidence. Show me a scientist that has gone to heaven with lab equipment and has come back with empirical, verifiable, demonstrable data. Because if you can't show me scientifically, then it's not true or just cannot be known.

And this last one is known as **naturalism**. **It's the idea that the physical world is all that exists. Nothing more, nothing less**. And this one really hits home for me. Freshman year of college, I take my first philosophy class. Loved it. Though I later found out my professor was an atheist. Second semester, I purposely take another class who everyone warned me not to take his class because not only was he an atheist, he was condescending and antagonistic with the goal to make students lose their faith. And I said, "Where can I sign up?" Now, at the time, I knew I did not know what apologetics was, but I wanted to hear what he had to say. And here was a pivotal moment in my life and ministry from one day in his class. He walks in, reaches into his pocket, and **pulls out this anti-depressant pill**. And he says, "Religion wants us to **believe in something like a soul**. And because of the soul, we can have hope in an afterlife, seeing our family and friends. And this soul is supposed to be immaterial. But according to Christianity, your thoughts and emotions and sensations are also supposed to be immaterial within this alleged immaterial soul. But here's the problem with that. If I were to take this anti-depressant pill, which is physical, it has the power to change and affect the alleged immaterial states of my soul. But how can that be? **How can something tiny and physical have the power to affect the immaterial?**"

"Every time **we look at brain scans**, all we find are neurons firing. And every time a scientist looks at **the brain and body under a microscope, all they find are nothing but the base**

elements of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen, but no scientist has ever found anything even close to something like a soul. So how do we explain that?" Then said, "I'll tell you how. The answer is simple. The answer is this. There is no soul. There is no God. There is no heaven. There is no hell. There is no afterlife. You are just a physical brain and body, a meat machine. And we need to learn to live with this fact. Get on with our lives and stop believing in these fanciful, foolish fairy tales. Class dismissed."

How would you respond to something like that? Because as a freshman in college, this really troubled me. And let me tell you why. For the first time in my life, I heard an argument that if true would prove Christianity false. How so? I'll give you the short version. 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, "If there is no resurrection, Christianity is false." Full stop. And additionally, he says, "Not only is it false, but people should actually feel sorry for us for how dumb and gullible we were to believe this stuff to begin with." And so, I submit to you, if there's no soul, there can be no resurrection. And if there's no resurrection, then once again, Christianity cannot be true.

Postmodernism says, "There is no truth." I once had a young lady say, "Eric, you cannot tell me Christianity is true because there is no truth." I said, "Really?" I said, "Huh? Let me just ask you one question about that. What you just said, is that true?" Because you just told me that there is no truth. And yet you said that as if what you just said is true. But if what you just said is true, it actually can't be true."

It's what we call in philosophy self-defeating. It's a claim that defeats itself. Now, it's funny, but without raising your hand, who could have given an answer like this prior to my response? Because you are the salt of the earth.

Let's go to scientism. Science is the only way to get knowledge about reality. Lots to say. For the sake of time, let's just say this is false for many reasons. I'll give you one. I often have atheists say, "Eric, give me scientific evidence for God." And my response is typically "why would I want to do a silly thing like science?" And because this is often met with a look of confusion, I break it down this way. Science is a great and wonderful tool for studying the physical world. But it is a tool that is limited to only studying the physical world. Whereas God, if He exists, is by definition a non-physical entity. Which means you cannot use something like science which is limited to the physical to try and investigate the non-physical. It's what we call in philosophy a category fallacy. It's the wrong tool for the assessment. It would be like saying, "Eric, how much do you weigh?" And I say, "Well, hand me that ruler. Let's find out." It's just not the right tool for the assessment.

The next and last one, naturalism. One thing I didn't say that we don't have time to go into, but I want to do it with this one, is that each one of these strongholds are not only vast in

our culture, they have even infiltrated the church as a whole, and we haven't even realized it.

Now, I want to just briefly show you with this one. A little bit of audience participation if you don't mind. Can everybody please point to what part of your body thinks? Can you do that for me, please? Okay, brain. Does your brain think? Yeah. Do you need a brain to think? Yes. Okay. Now, let me switch gears here a little bit. God the Father. Does God the Father have a brain? I didn't hear anything that time. I'm sorry. This isn't a Mormon church, right? No, this is a Baptist church, right? Just making sure. Now, Mormons believe that God has a brain because they believe he's physical. But as Christians, we know that scripture says God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. Huh, you're right. So, no, God doesn't have a brain because he's not physical.

But does God think? Oh, absolutely. Scripture says his thoughts towards us is more than the grains of sand. He's crazy about us. He thinks. But wait a minute, he doesn't have a brain. Huh? Are you made in his image? Well, wait a minute. So, does your brain think? Now, if you say yes, I have to do that all over again, and I'm running out of time. So, let me just come clean and cut to the chase and say the first question I asked you, what part of your body thinks was actually a trick question. No part of your body thinks. And throughout the history of Christianity, there has always been this doctrine that you're an immaterial soul with an immaterial mind made in the image of an immaterial God.

And granted, while we're embodied, yes, there is a correlation between our mind and brains, but that's no different than a musician and an instrument. Just because a guitarist depends on a guitar doesn't mean he is a guitar. Nor does it mean that if I crack open the guitar and give it a good shake, all the notes to the music would fall out. Why? Because the notes aren't inside the guitar and your thoughts aren't in your brain. Nevertheless, because we've been influenced by a naturalized culture, not only have we learned to recognize it, we don't even realize it when it's in our own thinking. And thus, we engage in the culture's language, and we talk about brains that think, but then we come Sunday morning, lift our hands, and worship a God that has no brain and thinks just fine. But we never let these two beliefs come together because quite frankly, we haven't really taken our theology that seriously. Stronghold. But you are the salt of the earth.

And while there's lots more to say here, I want to end with an argument for God's existence. And when I say argument, I don't mean I'm going to fight with someone. I mean I'm going to present a case.



Anyone know who this gentleman is?

This is Dr. William Lane Craig. If you don't know who he is, no big deal.

Just arguably the world's greatest living philosopher and theologian of our time. He has a really great argument for God's existence known as **the Kalam cosmological argument**. The title's a mouthful, but

it's an argument you can share with someone in 30 seconds or less. It's only three sentences long. So, if you're in a taxi cab, you can lead someone to Christ with this argument. I actually led an Uber driver on the way home from the airport. 30 seconds or less, you can share it in a taxi cab, in an elevator, or if you follow someone to the bathroom and they sit down, you've got at least 30 seconds, right? and you can just kind of get your witness. They're not going anywhere. And here's how it goes.

**Premise one**, everything that begins to exist has a cause. Two, **the universe began to exist**. And based on this, it follows that therefore **the universe has a cause**. Now, to unpack this a little bit more, we can see it this way. When the universe began, **three things** at least three things came into existence that did not exist prior to the universe. Namely, **time, space, and matter**. In other words, we can say **if there were no universe**, there'd be no **time, no space, and no matter**.

So when you look **back at the argument**, what we can now do is begin to **deduce attributes and characteristics of this cause**. And let me briefly explain why. In philosophy, causes are always greater than, external to, and prior to their effects. So for example, the person that caused my phone to exist does not live inside of it because as the cause of my phone, his existence was greater than, external to, and prior to the phone. Are you with me so far?

So when we look back at the argument, **we can see that if everything that begins has a cause, and time, space, and matter had a cause**, then it follows that the cause of time, space, and matter must be external to, prior to, and greater than its effects. And thus, the cause of time, space, and matter must have been **timeless, spaceless, and immaterial**. Do you know someone like that? I hope so.

**So, we can now say that if the universe began to exist**, at minimum, there must exist a being that was **timeless** and that is **spaceless** and **immaterial**. Now, I was presenting this one time at a secular college campus, and one young man said, "Wait a minute. You're trying to talk about God." And I said, "What?" He said, "But but seriously, why God? Why couldn't something natural have caused a universe?" Well, because nature itself had a beginning,

and if it needed a beginning, then it too would need a cause. And if you're going to tell me that nature caused all of nature, then you're essentially going to have to argue that nature existed prior to its existence in order to bring itself into existence, which is just logically absurd. And so if nature had a beginning, you need something beyond the natural world, something transcending all of nature. **Supernatural**. Literally beyond nature.

And then you would need a being that is **unimaginably powerful** to create something out of absolutely nothing. And then you would also need a being that is **personal**. Why? Because the universe didn't have to exist. It was caused to exist, which means it was a decision. And we know decisions come from minds. And the best case of minds we know are in persons.

And so we can now say that if the universe began to exist, then there must exist **a Being that was timeless, spaceless, immaterial, supernatural, unimaginably powerful, personal Being...** And I just call Him **God** for short. And I have the privilege of calling Him my Heavenly father. And if you don't know God, do not leave this room before you do. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its purpose and function, it is not good for anything but to be walked on. Has the church been walked on today? Let's not just learn how to present the gospel, but learn to defend it and let's partner together. And let's equip ourselves so we can reach this community and so that this church can be a beacon of light and hope in a lost dying world.

