

24-1009wc Transcript

24-1009wc - *Christian Apologetics, p74, Tom Freed*

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24-1009 Wed. Class - Christian Apologetics, p74

Transcript (0:04 - 22:54)

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Teacher: Tom Freed

We're continuing our study of apologetics. We're on the last chapter. So we looked at how convincing someone to become a Christian is more than just throwing facts and figures at them.

I kind of fell into this mistake where you think you have evidence or certain reasons that you have all laid out that's going to convince somebody, but sometimes it takes more than that. Just like the example that Josh, one of the authors, used about a football game. If you want to convince somebody about why you are excited about football and want them to come to a game, you wouldn't just give them player statistics or reasons why they should become a fan.

Can you imagine convincing somebody to become a fan? You say, oh, this guy has 300 yards rushing. Or this guy caught 10 touchdowns. They didn't know much about football.

They probably wouldn't care. Instead, you would tell hero stories of legendary players from yesteryear or perhaps some human interest stories about current players. You would explain the longstanding traditions associated with game day or just invite them to the game.

As a newcomer joins the faithful fans for a ritual-filled pep rally the night before, the communal tailgate in the morning, and they sing along with the band as the game time nears, they start to feel a twinge of excitement. Then after they're ushered into the stadium with an atmosphere of 90,000 fans hanging on every play, it isn't long before they find themselves high-fiving the person in front of them and hugging the stranger beside them. You see how much more exciting and involved it is if they actually come to a game.

Football games can be, you know, people can be pretty spiritual or pretty hardcore about it. It's like with worship. You could invite them here so they could experience worship.

Go to an SEC Southeast Conference College campus on a Saturday in the fall and you'll witness devoted worshipers along with exciting liturgy, cheers, singing praises, fight songs, and participating in ordinances, tailgates, and other pregame rituals that have been passed down

through generations. For most fans, it was these kind of experiences that led to their conversion. True conversion is never simply an intelligent and intellectual experience.

So you can see that, you know, maybe some people can be convinced just by facts and figures, but for most people it's a lot more to take them, you know, take them to become convinced to become a Christian. Experiencing maybe the whole, you know, thing of Christianity with worship, Bible study, maybe having a personal relationship with somebody, them having a personal relationship with Jesus, you know, maybe even Jesus proven to them somehow that he exists. So an important point I emphasize in this book is that Christian persuasion should be holistic.

So you should appeal to the emotions in the heart and build relationships along with other intellectual things. Like I said, a big part is experiencing maybe worship, maybe inviting them here, maybe being involved in their life, showing Jesus through how you act. Those are big things that can help convert somebody.

So we're starting off with signposts. Only shallow truths can be proven absolutely. The deepest answers of life are beyond absolute proof.

You get these people, prove to me that Jesus rose from the grave 2,000 years ago. That's impossible to do, but we have evidence that shows that he did. You know, you can't absolutely prove a lot of things, but if you look toward the evidence, there's a lot of evidence there, you know, with eyewitness testimony.

You also have with the Bible, you have a lot of, you know, revelation. You have things that were predicted thousands of years ago that took place. Even with Jesus, look at all the things that, you know, the Bible said was going to happen and that came true.

Thousands of years before. You also have the evidence of this world, the fine-tuning, how this world came to be. There's plenty of things.

This chapter is not offering coercive proofs of God. Christianity cannot be proven in that sense, though it can be justified. It can and should be trusted.

Instead of proof, consider the following arguments to be signposts. Signs say or signal something, but it is possible to interpret them according to mistaken frameworks or to ignore them altogether. There are ways around signposts, but the question is what take on these signs provides the deepest, richest, and most coherent view of reality.

The questions posed in this section can be used to prompt others to consider the best way to interpret these signs. The eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility. The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle.

It's wrote from Albert Einstein's *Physics and Reality*. It took somebody creating this world for us to discover it, for us to comprehend it. It just happened randomly in our brains.

We're just a random matter. How do we comprehend it? How do we be able to discover anything? Why can we make sense of the universe? One, the world is something that we can understand, not fully, but we can understand it. We're so accustomed to being able to comprehend aspects of the world around us that fundamental questions are quickly passed over.

What makes science and understanding in general possible? Why is it that the structures of the universe can be charted mathematically? As theoretical physicist John Polkinghorne muses, the universe might have been a disorderly chaos rather than an orderly cosmos, or it might have had a rationality which was inaccessible to us. Or, as Oxford mathematician John Lennox explains, it is very striking that the most abstract mathematical concepts that seem to be pure inventions of the human mind can turn out to be of vital importance for the branches of science. With a vast range of practical applications, we can see how math and science are connected.

It's not just coincidence. What makes best sense of this fit between our minds and the universe? Some argue that the human mind is simply imposing this structure on the world. The structure is only illusory.

But this fails to come to grips with the precise agreement between the scientific theories and both the observations and correct predictions made about the physical world. Others explain this fit is simply a cosmic coincidence. Correspondence between mathematics and the universe and the comprehensibility of natural laws has happened by chance.

Many, however, find this explanation actually does little to explain. Some see our cognitive ability to make sense of this world to be explained by our evolutionary drive to survive. Recall that the inside-out method discussed in chapters 10 and 11 advocated the approach of seeing the framework where a framework leads, or, to put it slightly different, seeing if the worldview can be consistent on its own terms.

For those who have embraced evolution, you can ask, does your view give us good reason to trust the powers that produce knowledge in us, to put our faith in the fit between our cognitive faculties and the world around us? In other words, for the sake of discussion, assume that our cognitive faculties are simply materials produced by natural forces. If this is true, do we have good reason to trust these faculties? Various philosophers have argued that, in fact, if naturalism and evolution are true, our cognitive faculties would not be very reliable. Think about it.

If our brains are just made of matter randomly produced by chance, how could you trust whatever you thought about things? How could you reason and trust your reasoning if your brain was just created randomly, a random collection of atoms? On the other hand, if God created us, and we're created in His image and we have rationality, because of Him, we could trust that. Otherwise, we can't trust reason if we're just made by evolution, made by some explosion. But even many prominent non-believers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Thomas Nagel, and John Gray, agree with theists on this point.

Why the agreement between these believing and unbelieving intellectuals? They're taking naturalistic evolution to its consistent end. Naturalistic evolution is concerned with the way we behave, survival and reproduction, rather than the truthfulness of our beliefs. From a naturalistic perspective, there is no reason to suppose content generated by neurological structures is true.

Alan Plotkin puts it, all that's required for survival and fitness is that the neurology causes adaptive behavior. This neurology also determines belief content. But whether or not that content is true makes no difference to fitness.

In other words, if naturalism and unguided evolution were both true, we would have no reason to trust that we are making any sense of the universe, which of course means that one's own claim to

knowledge is undercut. This fit between our minds and the world around us does not prove Christianity. However, the belief in God does make better sense than secular frameworks for understanding this phenomenon.

Christianity has shown itself to be, in some cases, ahead of its time in providing the framework for explaining the intelligibility of the universe. God created the world with an ordered structure, which human beings are able to uncover by virtue of being the image of God. That has been a settled conviction of the Christian faith since its earliest days.

A thousand years before anyone started to do science seriously and systematically. But this intellectual framework fits what we know now. And did not know until the 1700s.

So that's true. We can discover these things because God has created them. He's given us a mind.

We can think and reason to discover the things that he's created. If not, we couldn't trust ourselves. We couldn't trust our thoughts.

Why is it that the universe seems fine-tuned for life? Increasingly, there's a growing awareness that a great deal had to go right for life to occur. By analogy, imagine the universe being regulated by a complex system of dials. With each having to be at a surgically precise position for life to exist.

These include the cosmological constant. The strong electromagnetic forces. Carbon production in stars.

The proton-neutron difference. The weak force in gravity. In these examples, fine-tuning needed for these conditions for life to occur ranged from one part in 10 to one part in 1,053.

If one were off even in the slightest, human existence would not be plausible. The impression of design is overwhelming, quoted Paul Davis. With regard to fine-tuning, Alvin Plantinga concludes, on balance, the sensible conclusion seemed to be that there is indeed an enormous amount of fine-tuning, although the precise amount isn't known.

And it is possible to quarrel with many of the specific examples proposed. While, in general, fine-tuning of the universe has become widely accepted, does it function as a fine post to a fine tuner? For scientists like Francis Collins, one of the world's leading geneticists and a director of the National Institute of Health, the answer is yes. To get our universe with all of its potential for complexities, or any kind of potential for any kind of life form, everything has to be precisely defined on this knife edge of improbability.

Thus, he concludes, you have to see the hands of the creator who set the parameters to be just so because the creator was interested in something a little more complicated than random particles. As an illustration, imagine ten of the highest percent free-throw shooters in the NBA, each getting to take a free throw. With each attempt, none of them even hit the rim.

This, of course, could have been an amazing coincidence. Surely they have all, at one time in their career, shot an air ball. And it is possible that it happens for all ten of them at the same event.

Maybe they all had too much to drink arriving at the gym, or some other explanation could defend this unplanned coincidence. Most, however, would find this occurrence suspicious and assume that

there was something they had planned. Others remain skeptical of analogies like these, explaining that a fine-tuning argument proves nothing.

Again, it depends on what you mean by proves. I can suggest that you can agree that this does not prove that God is the hard sense of the term. It could be, as some argue, that there are zillions of universes, and it just so happens that our universe was the one that happened to be finely tuned for life.

Then again, the theory of multiple universes is only conjecture. As MIT physicist Alan Ligtham has noticed, we have no conceivable way of observing these other universes, and it cannot prove their existence. So that's another theory that goes against creation.

There's billions of universes, and just by chance, we happen to have the perfect one for life. But for argument's sake, given the chances of these zillion universes, it could be that all the cosmic dials would happen to land on the right numbers for life in some universe. What would be the odds? The odds for a single individual entering the lottery and winning are not good if some individual normally ends up winning.

Indeed, if one accepts by faith that zillions of universes exist, it is possible to avoid the fine-tuning of the universe as pointing to theism. While not rationally coercive, something about fine-tuning of the universe is still difficult to shake off easily. So Plantinga gives the insight into why this is the case by imagining we are in the wild west.

I'm playing poker, and every time I deal, I get four aces and a wild card. The third time this happens, Tex jumps up, knocks over the table, draws his six-gun, and accuses me of cheating. What's my reply? Have you considered the following? Possibly there's an infinite succession of universes, so that for any possible distribution of possible poker hands, there's a universe in which the possibility is realized.

We just happen to find ourselves in one where someone like me always deals himself only aces and wild cards with every hand without ever cheating. So you can see how ridiculous that is. The other players probably wouldn't be satisfied with that answer of the multiple-game hypothesis.

Even if true, it is irrelevant. Why would a multi-game hypothesis be irrelevant? Plantinga continues, no doubt someone in one of these enormously many poker games deals himself all the aces and a wild card without cheating. But the probability that I, as opposed to some other, am honestly dealing in that magnificently self-serving way is very low.

It is vastly more likely that I am cheating. How can we blame Tex for opening fire? It is analogous to those arguing in this way against a fine-tuning argument. The fact, if it is a fact, that there are enormously many universes has no bearing on the probability on atheism that this universe is fine-tuned for life.

It remains very low. So while not rationally coercive, the fine-tuning of the universe remains as a signpost for a fine-tuner and fits well with the Christian belief in God as a creator. So it is way more plausible, it makes way more sense that God created and fine-tuned it than any other explanation.

Like I said, they come up with multiple universes, but that still doesn't explain, you know, who created these universes or the probability that it would land perfectly, that we would have life here. You know, John gave me a movie to watch or suggested a movie to watch, which has said, you know,

there's like 20 different things a planet needs to have life. And the probability that a planet would have all these 20 was like 75, you know, 75 and whatever, 75th power or something.

I forget the exact number, but it was almost impossible. But even in this universe with all these planets, it's still almost possible, impossible odd, that there'd be other life out there. So like I said, the fine-tuning, that's a great apologetic for God, you know, for Christianity, the God of the Bible.

We know that, you know, even if we're a slight bit closer to the sun or a slight bit farther away, we wouldn't have life. Even the moon, if the moon was in a different position, we wouldn't have life. All these little things, there's so many of them.

It can't just be coincidence. We're going to stop here. I don't know if there's any questions or comments.

All right, we'll end in a prayer. Thank you, Lord, for another time to be here. Thank you for everybody getting here safely.

Watch over those who couldn't make it. Help Jim feel better. Help Tracy with taking care of Joyce and help Joyce with her dementia.

Help them find a new place to live. Watch over the rest of the sick and suffering in the congregation. Watch over those in Florida, North Carolina, dealing with extreme weather and the hurricanes.

And watch over us through the weak in Jesus' name, amen.