

# Answers to the Most Common Challenges to the Christian Faith with Guest Greg Koukl

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## HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

Answers to the most common challenges to the Christian faith. That is the topic we'll discuss today on the Christian Worldview Radio program, where the mission is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. I'm David Wheaton, the host. The Christian Worldview is a nonprofit listener supported radio ministry. Our website is [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org) and the rest of our contact information will be given throughout today's program. As always, thank you for your notes of encouragement, financial support, and lifting us up in prayer. Scripture says, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

That's from one Peter 3:15. Apologetics is a sophisticated sounding word for something quite simple, providing reasons or making a defense, as that verse says, to questions about the Christian faith. Important questions like, what is the evidence that God actually exists? Or is the Bible really the word of God? Do the laws of the Bible apply to all people? Or here's a big one, how can God be loving and good considering all the suffering and evil in the world? Are you able to provide good answers to those questions? That's what apologetics aims to do. And yet all the while realizing the best evidence won't necessarily convince an unbelieving, unwilling heart, and also realizing that God doesn't provide every last answer for any given question.

Yes, the Christian life requires faith in what God has revealed, but it is a very reasonable faith. Greg Koukl, author and president of Stand To Reason, one of the leading apologetics ministries joins us today to answer some of the most common objections to the Christian faith. We hope you stay with us to sharpen and deepen your faith in God and His ways. Let's get to the first segment of the interview with Greg Koukl. Greg, it's so good to have you back on the Christian Worldview Radio program. It's been several years. I can't believe how fast time has gone by. And I know we have listeners who didn't hear you the last time. So let me just start out with introducing them to you. First of all, what you do at Stand to Reason.

From your website, it says, "Stand To Reason teaches careful reasoning and well-thought-out answers, so that Christians will be able to participate in public discussions, whether at home, at work, or at the university, and present the Christian worldview in the debate. We encourage Christians to develop coherent answers to questions that challenge Christianity, so that their faith is deepened and are thereby emboldened to share the gospel in a gracious and compelling manner."

Greg, tell us about your background and why and how you became a follower of Christ personally, and why you pursued apologetics ministry.

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

I became a Christian during the Jesus movement. In 1973, I was living in Southern California where I live now, but I was raised in the Midwest and it was my younger brother who had become a Christian first. We were raised Roman Catholic. And then, when everybody kind of grew up, we had like five kids, my parents did within about seven years. So we had a tight shot group there and we all just left when we grew up. And it was mid '60s, all the other things were happening in the counterculture there. And I embraced that world, lock, stock and barrel. And my younger brother became a Christian first, Mark, and began to talk to me. And I thought I was too smart for that, to be honest, David. I just thought, "No, I was the only one of five that went to college and I've got it worked out."

Well, it turned out, I found out later that I didn't have it all worked out. And there was a series of events in my life that God used to get my attention. And in the fall of 1973 is when, and this is curious, David, I think for a lot of people, because I'm an apologist, but I didn't become a Christian in virtue of apologetics, the kind of things we'll be talking about shortly, like many of my colleagues and many of those who you've interviewed have done. Rather, all I could say is the more I thought about it and talked about it with my brother, who wasn't apologetically clever or anything, he just knew the gospel and he kept talking to me about it. I just was persuaded. It was true. It just began dawning on me, this is the real deal. So it's not any more sophisticated than that.

And after I became a Christian, I joined a Christian community in Westwood Village right by the UCLA campus there where I was a student at the time. And that is the biggest thing for me, that for two and a half years, I lived in this community and we had Campus Crusade for Christ, guys left Crusade and they all began this community, where there's a lot of training and teaching and stuff. And these guys were street savvy. And one of the guys other group there had discipled Josh McDowell, for example. I mean, that was the quality of the person. So two and a half years I had there, and that really set the trajectory of my Christian life. And that's when I got involved with apologetics. I read Francis Schaeffer, especially. Some Josh McDowell, but Schaeffer had the biggest impact on me. And in fact, in 1976, I got a chance to go to Switzerland and visit L'Abri, just as a visitor, but I met Dr. Schaeffer and was participating in some things there.

Then, things took off from there. When I say took off, it was like one adventure after another, but it isn't like it was a glory ride. It was hard. Everything was difficult. Even though I was a Christian and now I'm growing in the Lord, and I think a lot of Christians don't realize how challenging the Christian life is, especially if you want to be a servant for the sake of the kingdom, just like you are, and so many others are doing in their own way. You're going to be a target and every area of your life is going to be available to the enemy to take a shot at. So, it's been challenging, but it's been rich and it's been reality. I have been walking with Christ now for, like I said, almost 53 years. I'm glad that I can bring some of my experience to the table for conversations like this.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

There are great benefits to apologetics, and yet there are some limitations to what apologetics can do. You mentioned it wasn't through apologetics that you were actually, you came to saving faith. So talk about that, what people can expect by growing in better reasoning for their faith from a standpoint of how does it benefit

a Christian, but what are the limitations even for unbelievers? You can give unbelievers all the great reasons, perfect reasons and say it perfectly and they just don't get it and don't believe it.

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

There's a curious thing going on here, because on the one hand, we understand that a person's heart is changed ultimately by the rule of the Holy Spirit, and how much the Holy Spirit works to bring a person to salvation is that's a matter of debate among Christians. But we all agree that that's necessary. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. They're held captive by him to do his will. These are two different verses, one from 1 John and the other one from 2 Timothy. And there are other verses that make this point. And human beings are in rebellion. They're suppressing the truth and unrighteousness. So we've got a tough job. It isn't like it's an even playing field, all right? This is why the arguments are important and they are useful after a fashion and it's with a qualification.

Jesus used arguments and the apostles use arguments. We see this in the book of Acts and the gospels and actually all through scripture, we see this kind of thing, evidential appeals to people to respond, and they did respond in many cases, but not always. Famously, you have Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11 and a whole bunch of people believe, and a bunch of other people want to kill Jesus, because he raised Lazarus from the dead, and they don't want to just kill Jesus, they want to kill Lazarus too.

I mean, wow, that's crazy. So what this shows you is apologetics or evidences, and obviously a resurrection like Lazarus resurrection was a powerful evidence that Jesus was who He claimed to be, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. But they're not foolproof. It isn't like they're magic bullets. And if you just get enough of these things in your arsenal, then you'll win more people to Christ in virtue of the arguments. On the other hand, people say arguments never win anybody to Christ, and this is just false. In the New Testament, that's not true, and some were persuaded. You read Acts 16, 17, et cetera, and many believe because of Lazarus being raised, et cetera, et cetera, in the gospels. And we both know people who are won to Christ and they will tell you, here are the reasons why I was won to Christ, because of the reasons.

The substance of the apologetics, cold case Christianity, Jay Water Wallace as an example, close friend of mine, but there are many more. So we have this kind of interesting amalgam, this role of the Holy Spirit and also what the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to Himself, and He uses lots of things. Some people say, "Just preach a simple gospel, just love people. Don't use apologetics."

I said, "Look, you can preach a simple gospel and a lot of people aren't going to become Christians. You can love them. They're not going to become Christians."

It isn't like that's the magic formula. What we do is what the scripture tells us to do and the scripture tells us to speak the gospel, to love and to defend. So we do those things. That's our job. It's God's job to sort it out and decide how He's going to work in the midst of the means that He's given us to employ for the task. The role of apologetics, not just in evangelism to help people see, "Oh, that makes a lot of sense."

They rethink it and they do oftentimes, but the role of apologetics in the life of the Christian. When I go talk to pastors and say, "Look, I'm here to solve a problem for you. We're partnering up, because apologetics are going to help you, help your people answer the toughest critic they will ever face. And that critic is themselves."

Because doubt is everywhere and it's normal. It is not unusual for Christians of all sorts to have seasons of doubt. I get that. And I've gone through that. However, how do you deal with it? The way to deal with it isn't just to kind of try to wish harder. The way to deal with doubt, depending on the kind of doubt it is, especially if it's rational doubt, is to get the facts.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Greg Koukl, the founder and president of Stand To Reason is our guest today as we talk about answers to the most common challenges to the Christian faith. Now let's get into those with that as some context for our conversation. So I actually looked up online on artificial intelligence. What are the most common objections to the Christian faith and see what they say? And they had about seven or eight of them come back and so forth. And I categorized all of them that they suggested into three major categories. One is questions about God's existence. Second category is questions of God's authority, like what God has spoken, and three questions about God's character.

So let's start with that first category of questions of God's existence. And here's really the fundamental apologetic question that I think really perhaps all other ones stem from, is does the God of the Bible actually exist? The Bible is clear. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Just right away, in the first sentence of the Bible, there's not even an apologetic given. It's just this is the way it is. God exists. And other passages in scripture and Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is."

In other words, He exists and He's a rewarder of those who seek Him. I'm assuming you might agree with that statement that that's the most fundamental apologetic question, that does the God of the Bible actually exist and why is that the basis from which other apologetic questions flow from?

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

What you said was this is kind of like what I call the continental divide of questions when it comes to worldviews. Does God exist? Because the continental divide, the water falls on one side or the other and heads to the Pacific or the Atlantic. The Continental Divide illustration is a good one, because depending on what side your convictions take you, whether the no God side or the God side, all kinds of other things necessarily follow. So the water going from one side or the other side is going to end up one place or another. It's not going to flow uphill and trade. So the same thing here. If there is no God, and I call this the nothing option. I mean, it may be the case for the sake of argument, there's no God, but there's nothing else. There's no meaning, there's no significance, there's no purpose, there's no morality, there's no freedom, there's no free will.

All kinds of things follow from that. What we have to do is pay attention to the world. There's some things that are really obvious and one of them is that something's wrong. How about that? Yep. Doesn't matter where you lived or when you lived, everybody knows that something's wrong with the world. So this is the problem of evil. And we might talk about this in a little bit, but this has just the problem itself has ramifications for worldviews, because if there is evil in the world, objective evil, well, the question then, since evil is a departure from good, that means there must be a standard of good. I have to think of like speed limits. It's like you can't be speeding unless there's a speed limit that you're breaking. So there's speed limits in the universe that are broken. That's the problem of evil. Pretty obvious. Right. Well, who made the speed limits?

If you have the problem of evil, that means there must be speed limits, moral speed limits that are being broken, but there's got to be a governing authority that makes the speed limits or else there's no speed limits to be broken. What I'm doing is that I'm making an observation about the nature of the world that's available to everybody. I'm asking myself this question, what is the best explanation for that? Now every worldview has to answer that, David. It isn't like this is a Christian problem or a theist problem. It is a human problem.

And so, when I talk to secular audiences at university and I talk about the problem of evil, I just point out, "Don't think by becoming an atheist that you've escaped this problem."

"Oh, I don't believe in God because of the problem of evil."

"All right, let's say you're right, there is no God. Now, how do you explain and your worldview?"

So that's my approach with this basic question of God. And there are a number of things that you could go to like the obvious design in the universe, what's the best explanation for the design of the universe? What is the best explanation for the origin of the universe? And all of these things, there are more questions too. We already touched on the morality issue, at least the problem of evil. All of these things are guidelines, I think, that direct us. There's got to be a personal God who is the best explanation for this, because any other option is not a good explanation.

#### **HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Now we're still in that first category of God's existence. If there's a God who spoke the universe into existence, that's immense power that we can't even comprehend. So like you said, we would expect that His Son, part of this Trinity, would be able to do those same kinds of miracles, these supernatural things, but not only that He did in His own life, but that scripture accounts all throughout the Bible, whether it's Parting of the Red Sea, the Great Flood, or Jonah getting swallowed by a big fish. This is something that trips up, not only unbelievers, because we look out the window of where we live and we don't see anything "supernatural miracle" taking place. So you could argue that.

But even Christians I think sometimes have some doubts and questions about, "What, really? Did these miracles really happen? Was Jesus really able to walk on water? Is that just sort of an allegory or a metaphor for something else in life?"

So that's the next question for you, Greg, is how would someone actually know these things, when we don't see these kinds of things taking place today?

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

The impulse of people to dismiss these things out of hand, because they're miraculous. So what's doing the work there is a philosophy that they're bringing to the table first, not any real assessment of the events themselves were they actually historical or not. In my view, this is kind of cheating. I think we ought to follow the evidence where it leads. A lot of atheists are going to say, "Look, I don't believe in the supernatural world."

They may give reasons, but whatever, this is what they're bringing to the table that allows them to just simply dismiss it. Well, that belief should be justified, it seems to me. Why would you think that something like this is impossible in the world? And there's kind of an interesting little twist to this part of the discussion, David, because if I ask this atheist, "Has the universe always existed? Is the universe eternal or did it come into being at some point of time in the past?" Universally, almost anymore, they're going to say, "Well, it came into existence in the past sometime, the Big Bang, so to speak."

Now, I know some Christians are uncomfortable with the concept of Big Bang, but at this particular point, it actually is an ally for us, because Christians believe that there was when nothing in the material realm existed, and then bam, there it all was. Atheists believe that there was when there was nothing in the material existence, and then bam, there it all was. In other words, all I'm saying right now is we both believe the same thing. In their case, they think it had no cause, Where in our case, we're convinced that there was a cause.

Now, by the way, it's not just because the Bible says, "In the beginning God," it's because apart from that statement, it makes sense. What's the odds on favorite here, that the universe popped into existence for no cause with no purpose and no meaning? Which by the way, all of that goes together. If you accept the first part, all the rest of that follows, okay? That's the continental divide we were talking about. Or that like everything else we see, every effect has a cause that's adequate to it. So what would be a cause adequate to that effect? Well, something powerful and really smart and outside of the material world, since the material world is the effect, and probably a person, because it's persons who make decisions to do stuff. Atheists believe in a miracle after a fashion. In other words, the world is magical. I mean, that's a fair way of putting it, even from their perspective.

And what we have is an explanation for why it took them. So we can do better than them. We can offer a common sense explanation. And if they're just going to dismiss the explanation, because they don't like it. Okay, well, they're free to do that, but that doesn't make it the odds on favorite, because something from nothing is not the odds on favorite. If it's reasonable to think that the cause of the origin of the universe was a personal God, if He could do the big thing, make the whole thing, then He can do all the little things too. So the real crux of this question is not turning water into wine or virgin birth, or raising the dead or anything like that, or parting the Red Sea.

The real question is, is there a good reason to think that God was responsible for making it all, Genesis 1:1? And if we have good reason to think that's the case, then miracles aren't a problem. At least in principle, if we have reason to believe that the scripture is reliable on the things we can test and tells us the truth about those things, then it's smart to trust in the things we can't test. Again, as long as we don't dismiss them out of hand because this seems, quote unquote, unbelievable.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

All right. I hope you're getting sharpened by how Greg Koukl is answering some of the big objections like, does God exist and are the miracles actually real? Greg is an author of many books and the president of Stand To Reason Apologetics Ministry. We have links to him at our website, TheChristianWorldview.org, or you can go directly there at str.org, which stands for Stand to Reason.

Okay, Greg, let's move from that first category of questions of God's existence to the second category, which is questions of God's authority, what God has revealed, what He has spoken. And here's a couple of the questions within that category are, is the Bible really the word of God? Is it true and trustworthy, contradictions? Does God have the right to establish laws for us about sexuality, about roles, different things within the family and church? There's several questions we'll hit on here, but let's start with the one that I think is, again, there's a fundamental question here within this category of God's authority and it has to do with not God's existence per se, but what God has spoken, now that we know He exists. He's spoken in His word.

So the Bible is God's special revelation to mankind. It describes who God is, His ways. So let's start out with that question. An unbeliever might say, "Is the Bible really the word of God? Isn't that just the words of these authors?" Or a Christian might say, "I read the Bible. I'm new in my faith. How can I have more confidence that this Bible that I'm reading, black ink on white paper, actually is the inspired, inerrant and authoritative word of God?"

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

I do not try to argue that the Bible is the inerrant word of God with a non-Christian. I believe in inerrancy. So just get that really clear. I do not think we have to make the case for inerrancy in order for the claims of scripture about reality and specifically the nature of God and man, it can be taken seriously. People say, "Well, look, it's only written by men."

There's a way of dealing with that larger issue, but I have a question I ask, and this is a tactical style. I use questions a lot to try to make a point. And I said, "Do you have any books in your library?"

"Yeah, of course I do."

"Do they tell you true things about the world?"

"Sure, they do."

"Are any of those books written by God?"

"No," the atheist says, or skeptic.

I said, "So in other words, a book doesn't have to be written by God to tell you the truth about the world. You can assess the claims on their own merits for the reasons that are given by the authors and see if they match up with reality."

That is the way I think it's best for us to approach this issue. If we are trying to make the claim to the non-believer, and I actually think the Holy Spirit plays a huge role in convincing us that the Bible's the word of God. The non-believer doesn't have the Holy Spirit. What I'd rather do is set that issue aside and not argue for inerrancy, or even that this is God's word or whatever that's entailed with that, because the minute you go down that road, you're going to get hit with all kinds of other challenges.

Well, what about the contradictions? Well, the contradictions only matter if we're claiming that there were no contradictions in the Bible, because it's God's word. If our claim about, say, Jesus and the gospel says that the gospels are historically reliable, we can trust them to tell us about Jesus' life, His death, and His resurrection. Well, that's what the early church had before the gospels were written, that's what the testimony was. And I think that's how we should focus. And we take our understanding of the Christian worldview and help people see, well, look, our worldview is the best explanation of the way things are.

The way it's characterized in this book, whether you take it as God's word or man's insight, it still tells the truth and it rings true when we talk about it. So that would be the way I would approach the inerrancy thing. Now, this is a book that has prophecy in it. It has the power to transform lives. There's a story of reality from the beginning to the end that holds together in a tremendous unity, even though they have 66 books and 40 plus authors. There are reasons that we could offer that this is not just a book by men about God, but a book from God through men, human beings, about Himself. So that can be done, but ultimately it makes our job easier if we make that the issue before somebody considers the truth of Christianity. Let's focus on the truth claims. So that's the direction that I would go there.

I actually think that most Christians are convinced that the Bible is the word of God, because they've engaged the scripture and that's when the Holy Spirit does this thing and persuades us. Now we have more than this subjective thing we have reasons. I want to tell people the truth and this is the truth reflected in the scripture and I think the truth resonates with our deepest intuitions about reality and especially when we appeal to them regarding sin and forgiveness. Now, strictly speaking, that's not apologetics. We're going right to the heart of what people experience. It might be called the existential element, the human experience of things. We all know we're guilty and we all are hungering for forgiveness. And this is back to Augustine. You have made us for yourselves and our hearts are restless until they find the rest indeed. So, by communicating the truth of the scripture and the truth of the gospel in different ways and different words, that is the thing that has the power.

#### **HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

I like how you emphasize, Greg, the Holy Spirit, because you're right, we can give people really good reasons and there are really good reasons. The Christian worldview is the most defendable worldview by far, in my view, and I know in your view as well, but it is the power of the Holy Spirit that turns on the light, so to speak,

to be able to actually believe these truth assertions, these truth claims being made in scripture. Okay. Just one more quick one under this category before we get to the third category. So we're on the category of questions about God's authority. Talk about the word of God. That's where we hear from God, what His desire is, who He is and what He desires for those He's created. Let's get to God's laws though. People will push back against the Christian faith and say, "God has no right to tell me His laws about how I should live sexually or my gender or the definition of marriage." Love is love after all, Greg. One man, one woman, that's your choice, but I'm two women or two men.

The patriarchal issues, how God set up the family and the church or even the issue of slavery. I know these are all different apologetic questions that you can answer separately, but just comment on that particular issue of are God's laws just and right, in a culture that pushes back greatly against them.

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

The question here in a certain sense is whether the potter has the right over the clay or the clay has the right over the potter. I think that it is a normal common intuition that if there is a God who made everything, then He gets to say. Just like people who own something, "Hey, that's mine. I can do whatever I want with what's mine. And I made it. I can say what's going to happen with it. I earned it. I can spend it the way I want. It's mine."

Like I said, that's a very common intuition and I try to trade on these things that people already now, and then try to show the application to the question that you've just raised. So if there is a God who made everything, wouldn't He have the right to say how things ought to go? Well, this is the way kings have always worked and people in cultures where there were kings understood this entirely.

Now we have a very, very different kind of mentality in a democratic society, a democratic republic like we live in here. But even on an individual basis, we still understand if I make it, I own it. I do what I want with it. Who are you to say what I can do with what is mine? So that same intuition is in play there and all I'm doing here is making application to God. If there is a God who made it, it's His, and that's the way that works. Now, if a person wants to disagree and deny that, I'm going to try to appeal to something in their own life like I just did. You made it, you think you own it, and then you have your say of it. Why would it be different for God? And so, I'd ask that kind of question. So that's a basic intuition.

But there's more than just power going on here. Like God did it, He's in charge, He's got the power. You have to do what He says. Because these directives that God has given us are not just whatever His whim in the moment. Now I got a new truck about two weeks ago. I got a '23 F-150, but when I bought it used, they didn't have the owner's manual so, I had to go online and get the owner's manual. Here it is right here. And I got, it's a big thick thing. Now, why do I want the owner's manual? Because somebody made that to operate a certain way. And if I take care of it, it will take care of me. And that's what I tell my daughters about their vehicle. You take care of that vehicle, it'll take care of you. How do I take care of it?

Well, I have to know what it was made for and the parts, how they work and how to get them to work the best. We put oil in the thing every 3,000 miles. You get synthetic, you can push it to five. Okay, because it needs good lubrication to run well and do. Now, that's a perfect illustration for what the Bible is. It is an owner's manual. God has told us how He's made us for certain purposes. By the way, when it says in the first chapter, Genesis, that everything God made was good, what He means there is it was all working just the way He intended it to work. And it was all working out great until there was the problem, obviously, in chapter three, but it was all working out great. In the same way, God made us, human beings to operate in a certain way, and we read that right in the very beginning. It's interesting in the first few chapters, when Jesus in Matthew 19 is asked about marriage and divorce and remarriage, it's interesting how He starts. He says, "Have you not read?"

From the beginning, God made them male and female, chapter one. And then man will leave his mother and father, cleave to his wife, the two become one flesh and what God has joined together let no man separate. There's a formula right there for how things work properly. Men are men and women are women in order so they can reproduce. That's right there in chapter one, be fruitful, multiply. And sex is for marriage, one flesh in that relationship for a lifetime. "That's the way I've made it to work," God is saying. Now, you want to do your own thing? Go ahead. But you're going to suffer. If you can't put water in your gas tank, it won't work. This is what we see on a practical basis, David, don't we? That when God's plan is distorted or perverted, bad things happen. And boy, don't we see that?

Now, people don't realize it right off, because it seems like, oh, this is great. I can do whatever I want, however I want. Who are you to say? But it turns out when they do it their own way, apart from God's purposes, this creates a mess. God is a good God. He made us a good way for good purposes. We deny that and do it our own way. We have the freedom to do that, but we're going to make a mess in the long run.

#### **HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Yes. I tried that for a number of years in my own life and it didn't work out very well. Thank you for explaining that so logical, Greg. Greg Koukl is our guest today here on the Christian World. I thank God He brought me to my senses and convicted me of my sin, and led me to read the word, and understand and believe the gospel and redeemed me when I was in my 20s. Greg Koukl, founder and president of Stand To Reason is our guest today. They have all sorts of apologetics resources at their website for you to take advantage of. Their website is str.org, books, articles, videos, and more. We also have links to Stand to Reason at our website, TheChristianWorldview.org. Let's get to the third category, Greg, just for the sake of time today. We've gone from questions of God's existence to questions of God's authority, what He has said. And then finally, questions of God's character, who He is as the Supreme Being of the universe. You mentioned this particular question. This is probably the most common apologetic question that Christians might receive. The biggest pushback is about the problem of evil and suffering in the world.

I would say that's under this category, question of God's character. In other words, is His character really good? Is He really compassionate and kind, as scripture says? Exodus 34, "The Lord or Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and truth, who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin." And it says, "Yet He will by no means

leave the guilty and punished." And it goes on from there. That's God describing Himself, by the way, to Moses.

So, with that as a framework, you look around the world, you've mentioned this several times in our conversation. Everyone knows that something's gone seriously wrong in this world. Turn the news on any given night. 36,000 people, apparently they're reporting have been murdered in Iran with these protests. It's almost incomprehensible to think that many in just a couple of days and go to your local children's hospital in town and look at the little children who have terminal cancer. There was a family from here in Minnesota. I remember they were going off to the mission field. The whole family was driving across, I think it was Nebraska and were hit by a semi-truck and the whole family died. And so, just things that are just beyond our ability to understand and we think, "Where was God and all of this suffering and this evil that's taking place?" So how do you answer that particular question?

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

There's some complexity here, because you raised a lot of different things, David. I like to build kind of from the ground up on these things, and I've already started that earlier discussion about evil, that evil is a reality in the world and it's a human problem, not a Christian problem. If a person becomes an atheist, he doesn't get rid of the problem. He's gotten rid of one possible solution, God. Now, I think God is a solution in a couple of ways. First way is, it is only in a Theistic worldview that the problem of evil even makes any sense. If there is no God, there is no problem of evil, because there's no source of the kind of speed limits we talked about that end up being broken. There's got to be an authority over everything. And if that authority is God and He's not good, then there is no source of goodness in the world.

There's no standard of goodness. So there's a certain sense that God's goodness is a necessary feature of the universe if there is evil in the world. The ironic thing is that evil in the world turns out to be one of the best arguments for God, not against God, because without God, there's no problem of evil. That doesn't mean everything's good. It means that there is no good or evil at all. There's no category like that, because there are no laws that govern humanity, humankind in the world. In the strange way, just understanding the problem turns out affirming not only God's existence, but the goodness of God. But that does raise the question. How is it that a good and powerful God would allow the kinds of things that happen in the world that happen? Now we're talking about the why would God question. Those questions are the hardest to answer, because that requires that we know something about the mind of God and oftentimes regarding that particular question, He hasn't told us.

So, we speculate. Those speculations regarding the problem of evil are called theodicies. What would be a good reason? And there are different ways that people have unpacked this and probably multiple theodicies play into it. But I think one of the most useful ways of understanding this is that, why would a good God who is powerful, who could stop you, why would he allow it? And he's allowing it, because of another thing that's good. He made human beings to be the kinds of creatures that He could be in relationship with. He could have a friendship with us. Now, there are a lot of creatures that God made, but none in His image that had certain qualities, that made it possible to have a meaningful relationship. And one of those things was that

human beings are moral creatures. That means they could participate in virtue, do virtuous good things, which is what God wanted.

But also, because the nature of morality in human beings at this stage, they could also make choices not to do the good thing. So there's a free choice element here. When people say, "Well, why would God allow blah, blah, blah? Why doesn't he intervene? Are you saying you want God to intervene in every single thing that you are choosing to do in your life that's not right?"

I don't think you'd want that, because we value our freedom to make choices and there's a trade-off there and that's part of the trade-off. I think that's one of the most compelling things. Now, because there is human beings are the kind of individuals, creatures, whatever, that can be in productive, meaningful, satisfying relationship with God, and that entails having a moral nature and moral freedom, which also entails the possibility of using that freedom to do ill. Well, that's the kind of thing that we're facing right now.

Evil is part of our story. In other words, it's not a foreigner here. It fits right in. How could the world be this way? Well, this is what our story describes. This is exactly the kind of world you'd expect it to be if our story were true, and our story's not over yet. This is the other part that's so important here. We can make sense of the problem of evil, because of God's existence. We can make sense of the reality of evil, given that God is good and powerful, because God gave us a good thing, moral freedom, that we use for bad. Okay, now what? Well, God's got a cleanup operation. He's got a rescue operation, and that's in process. Right now, He's rescuing individuals who do evil. Ultimately, He'll rescue the entire thing and transform it.

But when that time comes, as C.S. Lewis put it famously, when the author walks on the stage, the play is over, right? So now is the time, 2 Peter tells us in chapter 3 that God is exercising patience to extend mercy as an example of His goodness. So we receive mercy rather than the justice we actually deserve. If we don't want to take the mercy, that's up to us, but now we're going to have to face the music in the end, because there will come a time, okay, game's over, now it's time to settle scores. That's not going to be a pretty picture for a lot of people. Everybody lives forever, but everyone does not live happily ever after. So, God is working all of those details out. This is the biblical accounting is the best characterization and explanation of not only the reality of evil, but how evil is resolved over the long haul by God Himself.

#### **HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

I like the way you reflected that back on who God is. It explains the way the sinful fallen world is, and this is the reason for the gospel and why He sent His son to redeem some from their sin. So thank you for that, Greg. As a closing question, what would be your exhortation to Christians listening today who... Or maybe even unbelievers as well. There's both in this audience, that they have an open mind and they want to believe, but they just don't feel like they have enough evidence. It's hard for me to live by, quote unquote, faith. I want more reasons to believe. Is there a point at which you think, well, there's a lot of reasons to believe all these challenges to the Christian faith. And at some point you have to settle and rest and say, "Well, ultimately faith is God's test for us." What's your exhortation for those who struggle with that?

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

I think at some point you got to either fish or cut bait, right? And you know this language, because you're in fishing country up there in Minnesota. You can sit on the fence, but there's no real fence. You're on one side or the other, because the time will come. When I'm speaking to a mixed audience, I will maybe make this point. The time is going to come when you're going to face Jesus and you have to give an account for your life, and nothing is going to be missed. That's the great white throne judgment detail thing. The books are open. There they are. Everything's there. That's your rap sheet. You're going to see that you're going to deserve what you have coming. Now, the mercy of God is great. Through the Lord's mercies, we are not consumed. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness, right?

That's available, but if you don't take it, justice is the only thing that's there. So if a person's so called on the fence, that means they're on the wrong side of the fence at that moment. Because if they were to go at that moment, then they'd be facing Jesus and the judgment without an advocate. I said this to Berkeley. I spoke at Cal many years ago, Berserkly, and I closed my discussion, the feelings of guilt. We all have guilt. Why do you feel guilty? I said, "Hey, maybe you feel guilty because you are guilty. Is that in the running? And the answer to guilt," I said, "is not denial. The answer to guilt is forgiveness. And this is where Jesus comes in."

So there, I'm just going right to the heart of things for the non-believer. We can talk all day long about this stuff, but fish are cut bait. You got to get in the game. And if you're not convinced there's plenty of evidence, but a lot of times the issue is not evidence. It's morality. They do not want to do what God wants them to do. Well, I get that. I understand that, but that's a heavy price you're paying right now for eternity if that's the way you're going. And for Christians, I have another little message and they can make a note of Mark 15:15, because this is where Pontius Pilate has Jesus in the trial and he's offering Jesus or Barabbas and the people want Barabbas, not Jesus. And he said, "What do I do with Jesus?"

And they say, "Crucify Him." And then what happens in verse 15, and it's very important. It says, "Wishing to please the crowd," note that, wishing to please the crowd, "Pilate released Barabbas and had Jesus scourged and crucified." The lesson there is there are a lot of young people, especially today that care more about what their friends think about them than what Jesus thinks about them. They're siding with Pilate and Barabbas instead of siding with the Savior. And my exhortation is don't let that be you. Don't let that be you.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Thank you, Greg. I'm just so glad you ended that way. It was just exactly the right thing to say, that. Fear the Lord. Love the Lord. Follow Him now. I was thinking when you were saying about the passage in Romans chapter 6, where this is from a standpoint of a Christian, Paul writing, "Therefore, what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?"

I mean, what good was all the sin that we pursued in our life for the outcome of those things is death, and then He says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but here's the good news. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." What great hope in the midst of our fallenness on the inside. So Greg, just thank you for coming on the program today. I'm so glad we were able to reconnect. Thank you for what

you've done for so many years at Stand To Reason, offering sound reasons for the faith and strengthening believers and convicting unbelievers. We just wish all of God's best and grace to you. Thanks again for coming on the program today.

**GUEST: GREG KOUKL:**

David, it was great fun. I always enjoy my time with you and I look forward to the next time.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

So many good points made by Greg Koukl, our guest today, the founder and president of Stand To Reason. I would recommend you go back and hear this program again to let these apologetic truths sink in. You can hear the program again by going to our website, [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org), or by searching for it on the podcast app on your device. Remember, the point of apologetics is not to win arguments or to accumulate knowledge, but rather to solidify believers in their faith and to persuade unbelievers that there are good reasons to become a follower of Christ. If you'd like to grow in your apologetics, I'll give you a couple of book recommendations written by our guest, Greg Koukl. Two books, *The Story of Reality*, and *Tactics* is the second one. You can find them at [str.org](http://str.org), or we have links at [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org). Remember, your expectations for apologetics should not be that you will have 100% observable, testable, repeatable documentation that you can hold in your hand.

God doesn't give all the details in the Bible of everything, but He has provided so much evidence for His existence, His authority, His character, that we can be settled in our belief. So let's pray to close today. Oh Lord, thank you for being so gracious and giving us answers and evidence for what You have told us to believe. We have a book, for instance, with four accounts of Your Son's words and deeds. There are eyewitnesses of His life, death, and resurrection. Old Testament prophecies point unmistakably to Christ as the Messiah. You even spoke from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

You've given us so much evidence about just this one question. Is Jesus Christ Your Son and the savior of mankind? He is beyond any reasonable doubt. So let every believer listening today do the work of deepening our defense of the faith and also convict the hearts of unbelievers that faith in You, rather than faith in their own human reasoning, is not only reasonable and defendable, but the only way to eternal life. And I pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Thank you for joining us today on the Christian Worldview and for sustaining this listener-supported radio ministry. Until next time, think biblically, live accordingly and stand firm.

The January-February issue of *The Christian Worldview Journal* features two separate columns, one by Pastor Virgil Walker and one by me on the worldview driving the fraud, lawlessness, and protest taking place in Minnesota. Managing editor Soeren Kern writes about the bad theology of the woke right, with popular influencers like Tucker Carlson and Nick Fuentes. *The Christian Worldview Journal* is a bimonthly print publication designed to sharpen your biblical worldview on current events and issues of the faith. It also includes a resource catalog and ministry updates.

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The mission of *The Christian Worldview* is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope today's broadcast encouraged you toward that end. To hear a replay of today's program, order a transcript, or find out what must I do to be saved, go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call toll-free, 1-888-646-2233. *The Christian Worldview* is a listener-supported nonprofit radio ministry furnished by the Overcomer Foundation. To make a donation, order resources, become a Christian Worldview partner, sign up for our weekly email or the Christian Worldview Journal print publication, or to contact us, go to TheChristianWorldview.org, call 1-888-646-2233 or write to box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota, 55331. Thanks for listening to *The Christian Worldview*.