

# Does God exist? Probably.

By John Halford

**‘C**an you prove to me that God exists?’ For many people it’s a challenging question. Where do you start?

The obvious place would seem to be the creation: the marvels of the universe, and the miracle of life itself. It couldn’t have just happened, could it? Surely the fact of a creation proves there is a Creator?

The surprising answer is, not necessarily. What creation shows is that God probably exists.

‘Probably’ means ‘having more evidence for than against, giving ground for belief’. But ‘probably’ is not—or at least should not be—enough to convince an unbeliever to believe in God.

In my career as a journalist, I have interviewed many eminent scientists who are committed Christians—there are more of them than you might think—and they have all said the same thing. What we see around us provides evidence, but not proof, of the Creator’s existence.

These men and women have no personal doubts. But they are careful

to explain that the basis of their faith is not scientific evidence. What they have discovered, in often brilliant careers in the natural sciences, may have reinforced their belief and reverence for the Creator. But no amount of scientific discovery will ever prove God exists.

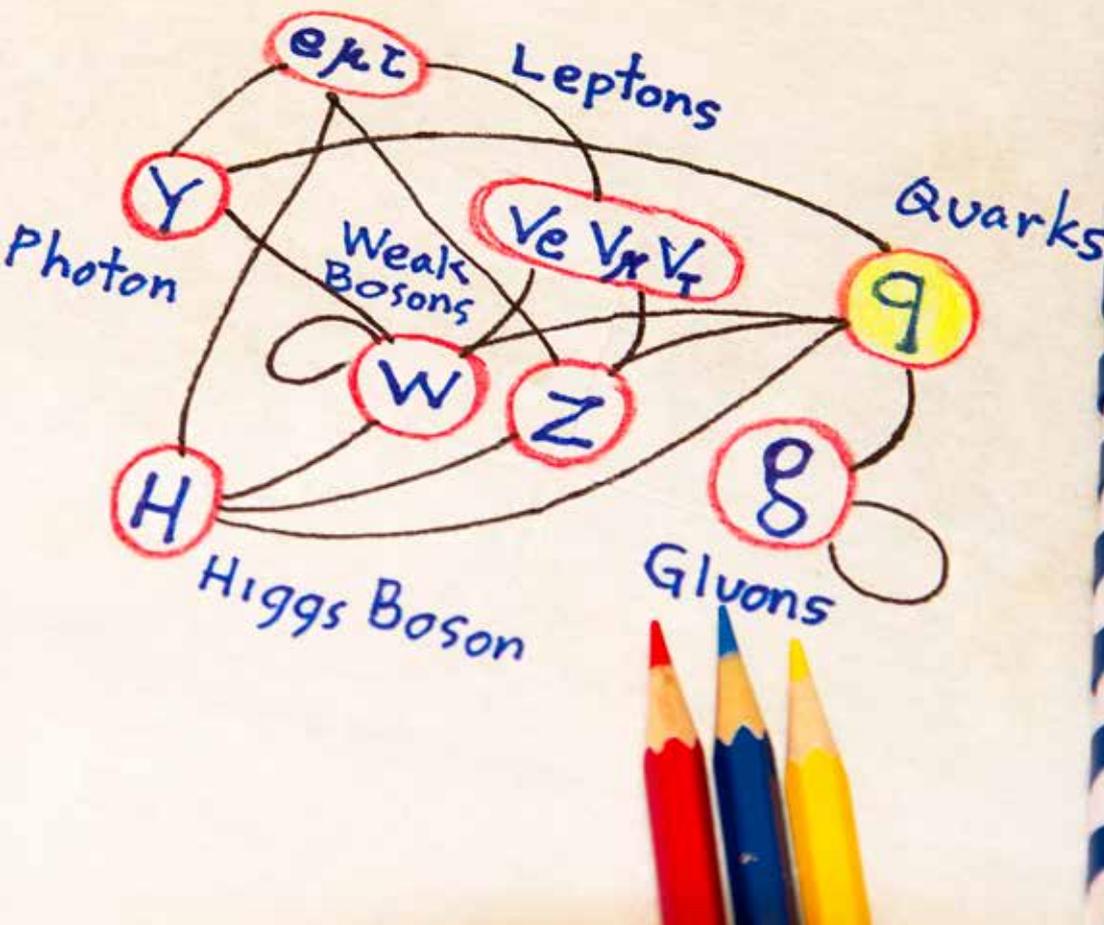
Here’s why.

## The scientific method

Most scientists work carefully and methodically. They are reluctant to say something is a proven fact until they are sure.



*The Crab Nebula is one of the visible wonders of the universe, first seen by Chinese and other astronomers in the year 1054. At its centre, 6,500 light-years from Earth, is a super-dense neutron star, rotating once every 33 milliseconds. The nebula and the pulsar, the bright dot at the centre of the image, may be evidence of God’s existence, but they do not prove that God exists.*



## PHYSICS PARTIC

1. HIGGS B
2. DECAY I
3. ELECTR
4. PHOTON
5. QUARKS
6. LEPTONS
7. GLUONS
8. UP DOWN

They make sure by proceeding step-by-step through what is known as the scientific method. It works like this: first you gather relevant data by experiment and observation; then you systematically analyse it; eventually, you suggest a hypothesis (in other words, 'this might be the way it is'); and eventually a theory ('this certainly seems to be the way it is').

Other scientists must then test your theory, and this may result in it being adjusted, adapted, or even rejected. But this is the way scientists discipline themselves to arrive at an understanding of the facts and laws of the natural world.

In real life it isn't quite as dispassionate or objective as this, because scientists have emotions,

opinions, and pride like the rest of us. But by using the scientific method, science has become very good at answering the kind of questions science can answer. It hasn't always been this way.

### Ancient beliefs

Until a few hundred years ago most scientists believed everything was made up of four elements: fire, wind, water, and air. Most accepted without question that the earth was the centre of the universe, with the sun, moon, and planets revolving around it.

But even though the ancients had a very incomplete picture of the natural world, what they knew filled them with awe. To some it was evidence of the greatness of the Creator. 'The

heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands',<sup>1</sup> exclaimed an ancient writer.

Even with the limited knowledge of the times, believers marvelled how anyone could doubt the cosmos was anything but the work of a master Creator. 'God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse',<sup>2</sup> wrote the apostle Paul in the early years after Christ.

### New perspectives

Today we have discovered so much more. We know we are just one small planet circling a medium-sized star that is one of 100,000 million stars in one galaxy. And we know there are thousands of millions of other

galaxies, all with millions, billions, and even trillions of stars.

To the believer, it is striking evidence of the Creator. But an increased understanding of the heavens has not necessarily caused modern man to grow in awe and knowledge of God. Other explanations for the origin and development of the natural world have been advanced. And from a scientific point of view these must be considered possible until they have been proved wrong.

At the other end of the cosmic scale we have probed deeper and deeper into inner space. Particle physicists have given us an incredible new understanding of the ultimate components of physical matter. It seems that our 'real world', at its most fundamental level, seems to dissolve into a shimmering latticework of pure energy.

### **Odds against**

But this unimaginably big, acutely balanced universe, and the intricacy of its smallest components still do not, beyond doubt, prove it is all the work of a master Designer/Creator. It is possible to believe all this is the product of random chance. The odds against this make it unlikely. But it is possible.

Even the apparent miracle of life has been explained without the need for a Creator. The more we understand about genetics, the more improbable this has seemed. The chances of the right things just happening in sequence are extraordinarily unlikely, but not utterly impossible.

So, however convincing the wonders of creation are to a believer, it is important for Christians to remember that they are not incontrovertible proof of God's existence.

Even the Bible reminds us that it is not the weight of scientific evidence, but 'by faith that we understand the universe was formed at God's command'.<sup>3</sup> Other explanations are improbable, but they are, from a strictly scientific point of view,

**Issue 29**

possible. And the improbable can happen.

My grandson, when he was eight months old, realised a lifetime ambition by getting hold of the cordless telephone. He hid behind the sofa and blissfully began hitting the keys. He randomly dialled a sequence that just happened to be the number of a police station, which reacted quickly to the incoherent gurgles coming down the line. My daughter found a policeman at her door asking if someone was choking!

The odds on the little boy hitting the number sequence were many dozens of millions to one. But it happened.

### **How do you find God?**

Scientifically the existence of God has not been demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt. Therefore it cannot—scientifically—be considered a fact. No amount of scientific observation can prove it, although it may certainly increase the probability factor.

But God has chosen not to demonstrate his existence beyond all doubt scientifically.

Why?

Because the existence of God is not just another question to be resolved. If it could be proved scientifically, it would be just another fascinating fact of the universe, finally locked in place. Some wrong concepts would be dislodged, and God's existence would be something we were now sure about. Atheists and agnostics would have to change their minds, just as medieval philosophers had to change their ideas about the earth being the centre of the universe.

But it is not just a question of changing minds. God's purpose in revealing himself to his creation is to change lives. The search for God can never be just another academic exercise. It carries a responsibility with important, eternal implications. It is knowledge that must ultimately impact the seeker in a personal way.

I once discussed this with an eminent British scientist who had



*Could a sincerely inquisitive scientist find proof positive that God existed through prayer?*

had an illustrious career as a physicist, academic, and theologian. I asked this man if he could think of an experiment that would help a sincerely inquisitive scientist to find proof positive that God existed.

He thought for a moment and then said: 'I think I would have to ask him to pray. He would have to ask God to answer that prayer in a way he could understand'.

That isn't avoiding the issue. It is confronting it head on. He couldn't—I can't—you can't—prove God exists to anyone else. They must do it for themselves.

### **An encounter in Athens**

About 2,000 years ago the apostle Paul confronted the philosophers of ancient Athens with this issue. He had, as his custom was, preached the gospel, first in the relative privacy of the synagogues, and then in public forums. His revolutionary message of salvation through a crucified Saviour aroused the curiosity of the most influential inhabitants of this ancient seat of learning.

They summoned him to appear before them and demanded: 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting. You are bringing some strange new ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean'.<sup>4</sup>

Paul was not intimidated. He knew his audience and his subject. The Athenians were intensely interested in religious matters, and considered themselves very open minded.

Among the many idols and temples of the city Paul had noticed an altar to the 'unknown God'. The cautious and superstitious Athenians didn't want to overlook any deity.

Paul decided to reveal this 'unknown God'. He explained that this God was too great to be brought down to human worshippers. He was the Creator of heaven and earth, and did not need a temple or altar. He,

## **You are invited to come and meet the sponsors of *Inside Life!***

Grace Communion International services are held weekly in the following locations:

**Auckland:** Mt. Eden Senior Citizens' Club Hall, Balmoral  
(corner Dominion Rd and Brixton Rd)  
Saturdays at 2.00 pm  
Contact: Rex Morgan, ph. 09 489 8910

**Rotorua:** Contact Peter Lindop, ph. 07 349 2272

**Wellington:** Thumbs Up Hall  
5 Elizabeth Street, Petone  
Saturdays at 2:30 pm  
Contact: Dennis Gordon, ph. 04 386 2094

**Masterton:** Solway Primary School  
302 Ngaumutawa Rd, Solway  
Sundays at 10:00 am  
Contact: Manny Ornejas, ph. 06 370 2916

**Invercargill:** Contact: Les Evans, ph. 03 218 7020

**Other NZ locations:** Small groups meet regularly in other cities nationwide.  
For details, contact Dennis Richards,  
ph. 06 353 6224 or visit [www.gci.org.nz](http://www.gci.org.nz)

the giver of life itself, needed nothing from those he had created.

How then, could mere mortals ever come to know him? Paul explained it this way: he would make himself known to those who would reach out to him. They would not have to reach far, because 'he is not far from each one of us'.<sup>5</sup>

### **A relationship with God**

But this unknown God, who need not be so unknown, would not reveal himself just to satisfy intellectual curiosity. The understanding of God's existence should not be the end of an argument, but the beginning of a relationship.

Here, then, is why God's existence is ultimately a question one can only answer for one's self. Today as never before, the heavens—and just about everything else we examine—are showing us more of the handiwork of the great Creator, for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. Our discoveries enhance our understanding and perhaps increase our awe and reverence. But the ultimate proof of the existence of

the Creator is a more intimate, very personal journey.

There is no short cut to proving God exists. But then, there is no need of one. As Paul told the Athenians, God is not very far away from any one of us.

The first step towards him can be something as simple as an experimental prayer, asking for an answer that the sincere seeker will understand.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 19:1

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:20

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11:3

<sup>4</sup> Acts 17:19–20

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:27

John Halford was a wonderful teacher, caring mentor, a prolific writer who could be serious and humorous, a loving husband, father, brother, and pop-pop. His love for the underdog was unwavering and he saw potential in people and places that others didn't. He died on 21 October 2014 surrounded by family.