

Is Christianity the Cure for Your Restless Heart? with Dr. Gavin Ortlund @TruthUnites

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FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, does Christianity make sense? There's a lot of people out there that try and say it doesn't, but you might be surprised to learn that it could be one of the best pieces of evidence for Christianity. The fact that it does make sense is actually something going on inside of you when you see something transcendent.

In fact, C.S. Lewis famously said this, he said, "If I find myself or in myself a desire, which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Have you ever had one of those transcendent experiences? Maybe you see a beautiful sunset, you see a beautiful mountain range, you have laughter with friends, you have the smell of cut grass the first time in the spring.

Something hits you, it takes you to a transcendent place. What is that? Is that a glimpse of heaven? Well, Dr. Gavin Ortlund has a great new book called *Why Christianity Makes Sense*. I'm about halfway through it right now, and it starts talking about something he calls the ache, and I think that's a good term for what we're trying to talk about it today.

Many of you may know Dr. Ortlund. He's an award-winning author. He's a Christian apologist. He's written at least 10 books. He's a popular YouTuber. He's got a lot of great apologetics videos and also church history videos and videos that deal with Christianity in terms of evangelicalism, Protestantism, Roman Catholics, Orthodox. Really good stuff. So here he is, all the way from an underground bunker somewhere near Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Gavin Ortlund. Gavin, first time we're having you on the show. It's long overdue. How are you?

GAVIN:

Doing great, Frank. Thanks so much for having me. Looking forward to talking.

FRANK:

Oh, absolutely. Well, I'm about halfway through *Why Christianity Makes Sense*, ladies and gentlemen, it comes out September 29th, and pre-orders are very important.



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By the way, I want to thank all of you who pre-ordered *The War on Reality* because thankfully, because you did that, we made the New York Times bestseller list just in the first week, and we want to try and do this, do the same thing with *Why Christianity Makes Sense*. So, if you're at all interested in this topic, and I know you are, go to Amazon, Christian Book, wherever you get books, look up *Why Christianity Makes Sense* and order it before the 29th of September, which is just in about a week.

So Gavin, first of all, this book *Why Christianity Makes Sense*, you start with the ache. First of all, why'd you write the book and why'd you start with the ache? And we'll unpack what the ache is here in a minute.

GAVIN:

Yeah, so for why I wrote it, it is surprising that there's not more books that really walk through just the basic case for Christianity as a whole. There are some great ones out there, and you've written one of them, but there's not as many as you expect for the importance of that topic.

And I do work on YouTube that is especially geared toward younger men. Who have a lot of spiritual questions right now and a lot of anxiety, and my heart just burns with a passion for them to find Jesus and to discover Christianity is thrilling, and it makes so much sense. The ache is really the motif of this book, so I'm trying to say that Christianity makes both intellectual sense and emotional sense.

It explains what you see outside of you, like the fine-tuning of the universe. I got a chapter on that, but it also explains the deep longings of your heart. And the ache is this restlessness inside of us that we're often distracted from. But as you said, it comes out when you're listening to music or when you're observing nature or when you're feeling a nostalgic memory or sometimes unexpectedly, it's this longing in your heart that you can't quite put a name to, and you don't even know what you're longing for sometimes.

It's kind of similar to what C.S. Lewis called *sehnsucht*, which is a German word, and it's this restless longing. And I think that's one of the key areas for evangelists and apologists to talk about. I think it's one of the ways we actually find God. I think it's actually sometimes the very whisper of God Himself speaking to our hearts.

FRANK:

Yeah, in fact, the subtitle of the book, *Why Christianity Makes Sense* is *A Book About Jesus, the Mysteries of the World, and the Longings in Your Heart*.

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Now, in the book, Gavin, you talk about certain times when you're walking at night, you have this ache. Can you unpack that for us?

GAVIN:

Yeah, this is just my own experience. When I go on walks at night, one of the moments of my life where I experience the ache is when I'm listening to the wind go through the leaves of the trees, and the leaves are rustling. And I say in the book, I feel as though they're telling me of something too exciting for words that I just can't put a name to.

And maybe someone who's listening to this can't relate to that exact experience, but I bet most people can relate to something like that. Where when you're out in nature or in a poignant moment of life, your heart is aching and longing for something you can't quite put into words. And I think that's a clue, not a deception. I think it's something we should pay very close attention to.

FRANK:

Yeah, I have three sons. You have five kids as well. It when you see your say a child born, I mean, you don't just go evolution, right? I mean, you go there's something transcendent here. There's something just beyond the natural. It's really sort of hard to describe, but it's one of those things you know it when you feel it. You know it when you see it.

You know it when you experience it. And when you have a moment like that, it does seem to point to a world beyond this world, as C.S. Lewis put it. Wasn't it Augustine that said something about a restless heart, Gavin? Yes, at the beginning of the confessions, "you've made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you." And I just want to say to every young person in our culture right now who feels restless, there is an answer to that restlessness.

It makes logical sense. It's intellectually compelling, but it will also make emotional sense. It's a both and. Christianity, I believe, is both true and beautiful, and I want to tell people about that and show the arguments, but also apply those arguments to the heart.

FRANK:

You also quote Pascal quite a bit in the first couple of chapters. Here's a quote from Pascal: "However sad a man may be, if you can persuade him to take up some diversion, he will be happy while it lasts." Unquote.

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And you spend a lot of time talking about diversions in the first couple of chapters. Why is that important to sort of expose?

GAVIN:

Pascal wrote that before the age of cell phones. How much more is it true now with cell phones? I think we distract ourselves from the ache. I think we distract ourselves from the ultimate questions of life. Pascal, whom I quote more than anyone else in this book, said there is two ultimate questions: meaning and death.

What are we doing here? And what happens when it's over? But what he observed is, it's amazing how little we actually think about those questions. We spend our lives sometimes focusing on other things while neglecting the ultimate questions. So the first two chapters of my book are simply trying to encourage readers to slow down, put aside the divergence, put your cell phone on "Do Not Disturb" and set it aside, and just think about the deep questions of life.

Because that's, I think, I think sometimes getting people to that point is the greatest challenge for sharing the gospel with people. We're so distracted we're not even thinking about the problems that the gospel is the answer to. And I really want people to slow down and pay attention to these deep questions of life.

FRANK:

I'm recalling something from the first screw tape letter where the demon, the senior demon tells the junior demon, make sure that you don't allow your subject to think too much, because if he does, he'll start thinking about transcendent issues beyond himself.

Have him start thinking about the number one bus that's coming down the road or the newspaper or that kind of thing. And it's kind of the same thing as what you're saying here, isn't it?

GAVIN:

Yeah, oh, exactly. Yeah, if you're never thinking about the ultimate questions, but then you know happily there are these interruptions where we, you know our culture is so good at holding death out of our vision. Our modern Western culture is the most skilled culture in all human history for distracting us from the reality of death, but we can't do it forever.

And there are moments where reality comes crashing through. Sometimes it's even in the successes of life where we think, is this all there is? Yeah, and my hope is this book will find

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readers when they're at those moments of their life asking the deep questions and I just want to tell them that Jesus is the answer to that longing in their heart.

FRANK:

Yeah, that's one of the things that's become more prominent since Charlie Kirk's murder was the reality of evil.

Certainly in my life, I've never saw anybody murdered like that. But when you see someone murdered, which is more common in other places in the world than here. I mean, there are 50 Charlie Kirk's murdered in Nigeria every day, and we don't hear much about it. But as you point out, Gavin, death is much more prominent and common, at least in the common experience of people in other parts of the world.

We don't we we we we try and push it off here in America, and then we hardly ever think about it. We'll talk much more about this and why Christianity actually does make sense with my guest, Dr. Gavin Ortlund. Check him out on YouTube: Gavin Ortlund. You can find it there. He's got several great videos up there on many different topics, and we're going to continue to talk about why Christianity makes sense right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network and other stations around the country. Today we're talking about *Why Christianity Makes Sense*, a new book that comes out on the 29th of September by my friend Gavin Ortlund.

You can see Gavin on YouTube. He's got some great videos up there. He's written 10 books now. I think it's 10 now, Gavin. Is it 10 now? Are you up to 10?

GAVIN:

I honestly can't remember. How pathetic is that?

FRANK:

I can't remember. He's got more books than kids, and he has five kids, so he's been busy. This new book deals with the fact that Christianity makes sense in a lot of different ways. Certainly, through evidence, in terms of the typical arguments we make, the beginning of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe, the moral argument, the fact that there's evidence Jesus died and rose from the dead, all those good arguments.

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But there's also some sort of existential arguments. There's this insight that we all have into ourselves that we sort of long for another world, and Gavin, in the very first chapter, the first chapter is titled "Absurdity: Is Life Without God Worth It?" You actually quote Blaise Pascal again about the cause of man's unhappiness. Can you relate what he said there?

GAVIN:

Yeah, I love this quote. He said, "The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." Which, when I first heard that, I kind of liked the quote, but I didn't fully understand what he was getting at. But I think one of the things he's saying is we use diversions and distractions to escape from ultimate questions and therefore, we're just, so often we're going through our lives and we haven't really slowed down to examine how do I live well?

What is this life that I have? What are we doing here? These ultimate questions of life. If we could slow down enough, we'd be forced to confront these deep questions.

FRANK:

And we rarely do. I remember Tim Keller many years ago quoted a book. I have not read it myself. Maybe you've seen it, Gavin, called *The Denial of Death*. He kept talking about that book because in the West we just sort of deny death.

We don't even use the word. Quite frequently we don't use, we don't say someone died. We say he passed away, or you know he's, I remember George Carlin famously said it's almost like the guy was a magazine subscription. He expired, right? We don't want to really talk about the fact that you know you will say he's with Jesus. That's true, but he's not here in this world anymore, and we don't even want to even use the word death.

We have these euphemisms for it. Right. And you know, in the old days they would have the graveyard right next to the church, so that every Sunday you go to church and you're reminded of your own mortality by past, and a lot of times families would bury their, you know, if the dad of the family dies, the family is responsible for the burial. There's all these reminders baked into most human culture that this life is going to come to an end, and I think you're right.

We put that aside. I heard a statistic once that if death is even mentioned, the religiosity of the room increases by a certain percentage, which is interesting because as soon as you start thinking about death, you realize how important religious questions are, and that's really what I'm trying to do in these first two chapters. I'm not making any arguments. I'm just trying to say, think how much this matters.

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FRANK:

In the book, you quote some existentialist, atheistic philosophers, Sartre, Camus, those kind of folks. What did they say about the meaning of life, absent God? If there is no God, what do even they say about what life means?

GAVIN:

They were, in my opinion, more rigorous and honest about that situation than many contemporary atheists.

Some of the new atheists, for example, are much more optimistic. But I think the older atheists, like the French existentialists, were a little bit more honest about the situation. They basically said, "It's bad." Sartre said, "The loss of God means that morality and meaning sort of collapse into our projection." So he said morality is like art where we have to do with creation and invention, which is really devastating if you think through what that means.

I mean, you mentioned a moment ago, horrific evil. When we're confronted with evil, if we really think through what does that mean, what Sartre is saying is devastating. Camus spoke of the word the absurd to describe the human condition. He basically said to summarize. The ache in the human heart has no answer. The human heart is a mismatch for reality.

There is nothing transcendent that we're longing for. The happiness we yearn for simply doesn't exist. And he used the metaphor from Greek mythology of Sisyphus rolling the boulder up the hill. This is the character doomed to forever roll a boulder up a hill, and it rolls back down before he gets to the top every single time. And he said that's human existence. Now he didn't say he tried to put as positive a spin on that as possible, but I think he's facing the real dilemma.

Once you've lost eternity, and once you've lost a sense of objective meaning that we discover rather than create, that it puts you in a pretty dire position.

FRANK:

How do you respond to the atheist who says, "Well, Gavin, I just create my own meaning." What is what is the atheist missing when he says that?

GAVIN:

I think there's a couple of ways to come at this. One is I like to bring up morality because, as you mentioned a moment ago, let's apply that to morality.

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Let's suppose that we make up our own moral meaning. That really doesn't stand up well in the face of deep injustice. If you really think it through, so if morality is nothing other than an evolutionary spin-off, so basically our moral tastes are like our preference for sugar. It's just what helped animals survive. That's why we have what we call a conscience.

There are a lot of people who believe that. The older atheists were pretty honest about that. That's again Sartre saying morality is like art. We're creating and inventing. If you really think through that, it's hard to endure deep injustice. We just know deep down when someone slashes the tires of my car. Or throws a rock through my window, or God forbid something far worse to my family, something like this.

We know that is not a matter of mere human preference. There must be something more to that. And so when I'm interacting with someone, I'll usually press into the moral area and see if I can make some progress there.

FRANK:

Yeah, because the very people that claim there is no right or wrong are going to be the first to complain when you cut in line. Right, you know, wait a minute, there's something wrong here.

If you treat them immorally, they're immediately going to say, "Hey, that's wrong." So, the chapter in *Why Christianity Makes Sense* deals with all this regarding the absurdity of life. Ladies and gentlemen, if there is no God, if there is no afterlife, if there is no judgment, it doesn't ultimately, keyword, ultimately matter whether you live as a murderer or a missionary.

Because you're all going to wind up in the same place, and that's nowhere. You're just going to go out of existence. Why do you think this lesson is so hard to learn for people, Gavin? That without something beyond this universe, life has absolutely no ultimate meaning, it doesn't matter if you live as a missionary or a murderer?

GAVIN:

I wonder if part of the answer is the sense of distraction.

And I also wonder if part of the answer is people are borrowing from a Christian worldview without realizing it, in some cases. We live in a culture that's saturated with Christian instincts. So, for example, the idea that every human being is imbued with dignity because they're made in the image of God. We just sort of take that for granted. Second sentence of the Declaration of Independence says it is self-evident that all men are created equal.

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And Tom Holland in his wonderful book *Dominion* points out that was not self-evident in the ancient world. But we think it is self-evident. And so, you know, I sometimes think people aren't wrestling with this enough. They're just assuming these ideas that really came from a Judeo-Christian framework or sometimes Christianity specifically, like universal human dignity. They're just assuming that, and they're not realizing what they're borrowing from.

And if there's more awareness of that then we have to come to terms with, oh yeah, what is it that actually makes everyone matter? That's not easy to ground outside of a theistic framework.

FRANK:

In fact, you quote a famous article in the *Duke Law Journal* from 1979. Arthur Leff had a famous article. This is on page 17 of the book, *Gavin*. The grand says who problem. The grand says who problem. And he has a quote about This particular problem, a God-grounded system has no analogs. He writes, "Either God exists or He does not, but if He does not, nothing and no one else can take His place." Unquote. I think that's well said. Because who says that murder's wrong if there is no God? It's not objectively wrong. It's just your opinion against somebody else's opinion.

GAVIN:

Exactly. Well, the, I love that article that you're citing there because it is pushing against what's trendy in the academic literature right now, and that is to try to have some kind of objective or transcendent meaning apart from God. That can be very trendy in certain circles, but what Leff is putting his finger on and others that I cite, like Nietzsche, is ultimately, trends aside, what's actually underneath that?

Once you've lost God, what really is there to ground objective meaning for human existence? And I think that problem has been dismissed more than it has really been struggled with. And I think the older atheists like Nietzsche and others were right to feel the devastation of their own worldview, which they did much more so than I think some contemporary atheists.

FRANK:

And you have a chapter on the resurrection: "The Great Hope For This Life." Why do you call it the great hope? Why is that something that just sort of breaks through the absurdity of life?

GAVIN:

So at the very beginning, I have a chapter later arguing for the truth of the resurrection of Christ, a historical argument. At the very beginning, I just have one chapter as a thought

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experiment to say, okay, we've considered what it would mean if there were no God, and it does feel pretty absurd, pretty devastating.

Now let's just imagine as one of the possible alternatives as a thought experiment, because I'm just trying to get the reader's attention at this point and help us feel the stakes. What if Jesus really rose from the dead? We're not saying he did yet. We're just saying, imagine if. What I'm trying to do is help a reader understand how thrilling that possibility is. If you're like Camus, looking at the boulder going up the hill from Sisyphus, and now you look over here and you say, what if?

I described the metaphor I use for this is like Lucy going the wardrobe through the wardrobe into Narnia. It's utterly enchanting to think that the suffering of this life can be worked unto good and to glory for those who are in Christ, which is one of the implications of Christ's resurrection that evil may not just end one day but actually can be redeemed as it is yielded unto God.

I mean, that is unbelievably comforting and nourishing, and I just want people to feel what's at stake. I want people to slow down, pay attention to the ache in their hearts, put aside distractions, and just feel how much it really matters whether God exists, whether Jesus rose from the dead, so that when we get to chapter 3 of the book, where I start making arguments, our attention hopefully has been somewhat increased.

FRANK:

Was it Pascal who said, "Don't just show them that Christianity is true, but make them want it to be true."

GAVIN:

Yes, and I think there's a lot of wisdom in that. I mean, and we function like this in other areas of life, right? We never just use mere logical arguments to try to maneuver someone. We want to appeal to them as a whole person, and I think for apologists, we should do the same.

We should appeal to the heart and the mind at the same time, because often the heart falls first and then the mind follows.

FRANK:

Exactly, that's why I normally ask the question: If Christianity were true, would you become a Christian? And that, the answer to that question would reveal a lot. A lot of people don't want it

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to be true, but I don't think they've considered the implications of it fully when they say no. Anyway, we're going to come back with Dr.

Gavin Ortland. We're going to talk more *Why Christianity Makes Sense* right after the break. Don't go anywhere.

AD:

Could you answer this question? Why doesn't God let everyone into heaven? Or do all religions get you to heaven? Well, Frank Turek can, and now you can. Watch him tackle the toughest questions from his latest college tour appearance. See real students challenge Frank, and watch how truth stands up under pressure. Subscribe to our Cross Examined YouTube channel right now to watch. That's Cross Examined, two words, on YouTube and sharpen your faith for the real world.

FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, this weekend I'll be at a church just south of Tucson, Arizona. Details are on our website. Then, Lord willing, Monday night, Arizona State University, just outside of Phoenix, really in Phoenix, Tempe, Arizona. All the details are on our website. I will have a special guest with me. I won't tell you who that is. You're going to have to show up. It'll also be live streamed, Lord willing, on our YouTube channel.

We're talking about if God, why evil in that particular college event. Thanks for praying for that, and thanks to all who have donated. As you know, every time we go to a college campus now since Charlie's murder, we have to bring security. It's an extra \$10,000 every time we go to a college campus just in security costs. So thank you for stepping up and helping us do that.

Let me go back to my guest, Dr. Gavin Ortland, who has a great new book called *Why Christianity Makes Sense*. It comes out on the 29th of September. It has many of the arguments you hear that we make here at I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, but it goes beyond that and talks about some other more personal, experiential arguments for Christianity. One that we've been talking about is this ache we all have for some transcendence beyond this world. But Gavin, you also make some arguments about the historicity of Jesus. What do you think are some of the best arguments? I know it's a very broad topic, but the best arguments that Jesus actually did come, actually did predict and accomplish his own resurrection from the dead to prove he was God? If you just had a few minutes with somebody, where would you go on that?

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GAVIN:

Yeah, these are fun to talk about, and I find they're helpful in evangelism. So after the arguments for God's existence in the book, I give three arguments about Jesus. First, from his claims to be God, second, from his resurrection and the birth of Christianity, and third, from fulfilled prophecy. And I hope we can talk about fulfilled prophecy before the end, because that's a really fun argument that surprised me in terms of how interesting and effective it can be.

But the claims to be God, I think, are a really helpful place for all of us, wherever we're coming from, to land. And the invitation is: let's consider what is our view of Jesus of Nazareth. Here's this very compelling human being who impacted the world hugely. The largest and most diverse religion is founded by him, so we should have some interpretation of who he was. And I make the case that he really did claim to be God.

So I push against this idea that that's just a legendary accretion late in the first century and second century that developed way after the historical Jesus. And I make the case, no, I think within the Gospel of Mark, we can see that Jesus assumed divine authority in his ministry, and quoted Old Testament scriptures to that end. And if that is so, it raises this fascinating trilemma that C.S.

Lewis articulated so beautifully in *Mere Christianity* and elsewhere. Well, is he telling the truth, or is he wrong? If he's wrong, the other options seem what he, Lewis, called liar or lunatic. He's either a lord, liar, or lunatic, and it's strange to think that either of those could be true. If he's a liar, I mean, you think of his, for example, he says in the Gospel of Matthew, "Whoever gives up his life for me will get a hundredfold in the next life." Well, if he's just tricking people, if he knows that that's not true, that makes him supremely malevolent, which seems odd to reconcile with the goodness and fruit of his life.

And it's also unclear what his own motive would be for holding to that lie unto his own crucifixion. But if he's simply mistaken, and he's saying things like, "I came down from heaven, I'm going to judge all the nations of the world, I'm the figure from Daniel 7, I can forgive sins," et cetera, you know, "where two or three are gathered, there I am." You just have to wonder, how, what is the mechanism that can generate such gargantuan self-delusion?

And I, you know, I say it's strange to think that humanity's largest religion is founded by someone you probably wouldn't trust to babysit your kids because he's saying these things that are just so over the top. I mean, he's saying I'm truth, I'm life, I'm God, and I think though, it's,

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there's different views on Lewis's argument, I still am persuaded that Lewis's Lord, Liar, Lunatic appeal has some force, and I like to use it to invite people to come to terms with the claims of this amazing man in history.

FRANK:

What do you do when people push back and say, "Well, he never really claimed to be God, Gavin." So what would you say back?"

GAVIN:

So I have a whole section. I expand the trilemma to a tetralemma, meaning Lord, Liar, Lunatic, Legend. Thankfully, the alliteration still checks out there. And I say, here's, and I go through the Gospel of Mark, which many scholars date to the 60s A.D., well within living memory of the events it describes.

FRANK:

Hey, by the way, before you go there, let me just point one thing out. We just updated *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*. It comes out in about a month, and in my research there, Gavin, I've noticed that there's only been two full-length books written on the dating of the gospels in the past, say, five decades. One by Bishop A. T. Robinson, who was actually very liberal and not a really believer, and one by, I'm losing his name right now, Bernier. I can't see it off the top of my head.

GAVIN:

Jonathan Bernier.

FRANK:

Yeah. Anyway, he dates Mark in the 40s and has good reasons for it too. In any event, even if it's the 60s, it's still early. I just wanted to throw that out there that I think the traditional dating that even the very liberal scholars use for the dating of the gospels is probably too late.

I think the gospels are earlier, and even now they're making arguments that, in fact, Dan Wallace made this argument that John is written prior to 70 due to, you know, John 5:2, that there is in Jerusalem a pool called Bethesda. That wouldn't be the case after 70 A.D. But in any event, sorry to interrupt. Go ahead.

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GAVIN:

No, no, I'm glad you said that because that's it. Actually, it's interesting you said that the video I put out yesterday on my YouTube channel as of us recording this is arguing for an early date to John.

Just in line with what you were saying from Dan Wallace and others, because there's some other pretty high scholars in John who do the same. They say even John may go back to the 60s A.D. and I'm kind of sympathetic to that idea myself. I think that it makes a lot of sense. But even if you put John a little later, we're not late enough for all of the claims of Christ to be taken out of his own mouth.

We have good reason to think even the most liberal scholars, even the Jesus Seminar said a lot of the gospel still goes back to the historical Jesus, like in Mark. But in Mark, even you've got the whole plot is he's crucified for blasphemy. He's forgiving sins and then at his final trial Caiaphas tears his clothes because he's quoting Daniel 7. I think the key there is he's claiming to be God in a very Jewish way.

In the context of ministry. He's not doing it in a philosophical way, which of course makes sense because his purpose was not to teach philosophy. He's coming to inaugurate God's kingdom. So, but I make the case in the book, yes, even in Mark, Jesus is claiming to be God.

FRANK:

Yeah, there's a whole chapter, chapter six: "Jesus: Did a Man Really Claim to Be God?" So you can dive in much further there. How about this idea of divine hiddenness?

Because you have a whole chapter on this, Gavin, and I've noticed. Actually, the top two sort of counterarguments to Christianity, I would say, the biggest ones are, if God, why evil? And secondly, if God does exist, why does he appear to hide himself?

Why isn't he more overt? Now I actually think, the first argument on evil can't even work unless God does exist, right? There's no standard of good without God, and therefore you wouldn't even know what evil was. So I don't think the argument against God on account of evil goes anywhere. I think it actually shows God does exist. But the hiddenness of God is a little bit more subtle. What do you say in the book about why isn't God more overt? He could just clear all this up and just show up, Gavin, and you know, correct everybody right now. Why doesn't he do it?

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GAVIN:

Yeah, yeah. This, so someone asked me yesterday what I think is the best, most increasing and cutting-edge argument against Christianity and I said divine hiddenness. It's very popular, and I think the internet has furthered this argument, and it's common in academic literature as well.

So what I would say is, first of all, divine hiddenness has always been a problem, or not even a problem. It's always been something Christianity has taught. The book of Isaiah says, "You are a God who hides Himself." And it's only been in recent times that that's been taken to entail God doesn't exist. I argue that the expectations involved are very modern and Western, that God is going to zip open the sky and wave at us or something like this, and that the ancient way of thinking is that God has good reasons for not giving us this kind of overpowering revelation.

He still gives us an adequate revelation. It is sufficient for its purposes, but it's true that he doesn't unzip the sky and do miracles every five minutes to make it overpowering. And what I argue is, there's good reasons God has for doing that, both for his own nature and also for what is actually good for us. And this is where Pascal and Kierkegaard have helped me so much.

And here's what I like to say: Would it really be good for us if God did miracles every five minutes? In the Bible, people who receive miracles often end up rejecting God.

[FRANK]:

That's right. Yeah.

GAVIN:

Like Pharaoh hardening his heart. What if God is actually giving us the kind of revelation of Himself through our conscience and through His providential oversight of the world that is best suited for our actual need, which is moral transformation.

The problem in our world is not mere ignorance. The problem is sin, and to overcome sin, a bombardment of miracles or some more overt revelation wouldn't necessarily be well suited. What God has done in becoming a man, God the Son, being born as a man and dying on a cross for our sins, is arguably the most effective way to actually get at the real problem, which is the hardness of heart in human beings.

And here is where I think the question that you posed earlier, if Christianity were true, would you believe it, is very relevant. Because there's lots of people who would say, basically no, or even if God did overpoweringly reveal Himself, I still would reject Him. Well, in that

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circumstance, God is not obligated to give clearer and clearer revelation because it wouldn't do any good. Because that's not addressing the issue.

FRANK:

Yeah, there's also a difference between belief that and belief in, right? Belief that even the demons know that God exists, but they don't trust in Jesus. They don't want to. It's against their will. But still, what do you say to the atheist who says, "Look, I'm a non-resistant non-believer." In other words, if God is love, Gavin, and I'm open to His love, but I haven't seen any evidence that He exists, why doesn't He give me more evidence?

GAVIN:

Yeah. I have a whole section on non-resistant non-belief, and I'm trying to make the case that we should be very humble about assuming non-resistance. We should be careful because we don't always know what is going on in our own hearts. And what I really put the flashlight on in this chapter is conscience. Everybody, from a Christian perspective, has a conscience, and they're already relating to God through their conscience.

And it is possible, and I draw from some philosophers who've argued for this, to be resistant to God without fully thinking of it as God that you're resisting, because from a Christian perspective, God is goodness itself, and when we violate our conscience and go against what we know is right, we are in a sense resisting God, even if we don't think of it like that. And so you know, read the case for the or read the book for the full case.

FRANK:

Yeah, there's an entire chapter on this very important topic. In fact, there's a famous story that Søren Kierkegaard gave that will help us. We'll discuss it right after the break. I'm talking to Gavin Ortlund. His brand-new book, *Why Christianity Makes Sense*, you need to get it. Get it now. Go to Amazon, Christian Book. I'm Frank Turek. See you in 2 minutes. Don't go anywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, why does Christianity make sense? Well, there's a brand new book that will tell you why it makes sense. It's by my guest today, Dr. Gavin Ortlund. He's got a great YouTube channel, by the way, by his name, Gavin Ortlund, you can check him out there. And today we're talking about this book that comes out on the 29th there's so many good arguments in it and actually some difficult issues that Gavin tackles in here, in addition to the hiddenness of God we're going to get back to in a minute there's a chapter on so-called slavery in the Bible.

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There's a chapter in there about so-called genocide. You know, why does God appear to be so judgmental in the Old Testament, all that kind of stuff that's in there as well, in addition to the traditional arguments for the existence of God and also the resurrection of Jesus. But Gavin, let's go back to this hiddenness issue, if we can for just a second. Years ago, I think I was reading a, I think it was a Philip Yancey book many years ago I was reading when he brought up this, this argument, or I should say analogy that Søren Kierkegaard many years ago in the 1800s brought forth regarding the hiddenness of God. Can you relate that analogy to us?

GAVIN:

Yeah, I love this story. It's the parable of a king who falls in love with a poor maiden, and he suddenly faces this dilemma of how do I get to know her? How do I pursue her? Because if he just goes with all of his royal splendor, this actually isn't the ideal circumstance for love to develop. And he thinks through with his advisors all these different options, and he finally comes to realize the best way to do this is to disguise myself as a poor person, and go live right next to her and build a relationship with her while she doesn't even know I am the king.

And he's using this as a metaphor for what God has done for us in Christ. When God came, He came in humility, amazingly. He came in service, amazingly. And Kierkegaard is basically teaching us, God has revealed Himself to us in the way that is ideally suited for us to repent and love God. Because that's what he wants us to do.

What good would it be if we begrudgingly acknowledged God's existence while still hating him? He wants to turn our heart unto love for himself, and that's what, as followers of Jesus, we believe he's done in Christ.

FRANK:

Yeah, William Lane Craig, who, by the way endorses this book, *Why Christianity Makes Sense*, said this before. He said, "God just doesn't want you to acknowledge that He exists." You know, it's just like a, it's not just another fact in your mind that you say, "Oh yeah, I know that God exists." That's not really a relationship.

That's just you assent that God exists, much like the demons do. Oh yeah, we know God exists, right? But we don't trust in Him. We're not seeking a relationship with Him. We're not repenting and accepting the free gift that His sacrifice has provided just by saying, "Oh yeah, I know that He exists." And the hiddenness of God is dealing more with just the fact that God has to veil Himself to a certain degree.

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If He's too overt, then He can overpower our free will and our free choice, and may actually create more rebellion. I mean, look at all the Israelites. They're going through the, they're going through the Exodus seeing miracle after miracle, and after, you know, a few bad days in the desert, they're like, "Hey, Moses, take us back to Egypt. I mean, this is ridiculous. What's going on here? We want to.

We want our old life. At least we had something to eat." I mean, it's like they completely forget. And aren't we the same way, Gavin? Don't we forget so often? We may, we may feel like we've had some sort of interaction with God. Maybe He answered a prayer or something like that. And then two weeks later, we're going, "I don't even know if God exists." Why are we like that?

GAVIN:

I don't know, but I can relate to this personally, and I'm wondering if some of our listeners can as well, because I've had moments, yeah, where I'm going through something and I'm saying, God, where is God?

Why isn't God being more showing up more? And then I stop, and if I just make the deliberate act to remember all the ways God has been faithful to me in my life, I realize how myopic and narrow my vision has become. So maybe some of our listeners can relate to that personally too.

FRANK:

Yeah, you're quoting Michael Ray here in the chapter on divine hiddenness. You say, quote, "the problem of divine hiddenness, like the problem of evil, is fundamentally a problem of violated expectations," unquote. Unpack that further. What does he mean by that?

GAVIN:

So here's where I use an illustration from Home Alone, okay? And I'm saying basically sometimes we bring these expectations for how God needs to reveal Himself to us. And one of the things I'm drawing attention to is these are very modern and these are very Western. And I'm kind of criticizing some of the academic work on this that seems to have this idea of divine love that is not very tough-minded and doesn't really balance God's love with His transcendence.

Baked into the idea of transcendence is that you're not always going to be aware every second of your life of exactly how God is loving you. So we need to be a little more tough-minded about how we conceptualize divine love and how we expect God to act. So that's part of that, and the

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metaphor from Home Alone is there's a character in this movie that Kevin, the little child thinks is an evil character, and he's scared of him. He's outside.

People may remember this movie. I can't remember Old Man Marley, I think is his name, but he's outside shoveling the snow and so forth. This movie's old enough. I think I can give a spoiler here, but he's actually not the bad guy. And I make the point: look, if we have false expectations of what a loving person will do, how much more should we be humble about the expectations we bring to divine love and infinite love?

FRANK:

Yes. So is it fair to say that what we consider to be love is often comfort? Whereas God will often bring difficulty into our lives and even discipline because He loves us, I think that's Hebrews chapter 12, right? He disciplines those He loves.

GAVIN:

Yes, and to speak from a personal standpoint, sometimes comfort is what we want, but also certainty. And I've had moments in my life where I'm asking for certainty, but I wonder if actually certainty isn't always good for us.

Sometimes the adequate but not yet totally overpowering revelation God gives of himself is actually good for us, and that's the ideal circumstance for us to come to relate to God in the way that He wants us to.

FRANK:

Why is that? Is it because then we pursue the relationship, because we're trying to close the gap between our, say, ambiguity and certainty, or why would you say it's good for us that that certainty is not something that we attain?

GAVIN:

I think part of it is what needs to happen for every human being in our relationship with God is a moral conversion, and certainty does not necessarily serve that end, but rather the partial hiddenness and partial veiling that God gives is the best context for us to learn to seek God. Pascal has this famous quote where he's saying, "How could you seek God if He were as obvious as the noonday sun? There would be no sense of seeking him whatsoever," and yet seeking God is one of the things that's good for us.

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He also makes the point that God's nature is infinite. What would it even mean for God to give a full unveiling? How could He even do that? I mean, He's infinite and He's invisible, so He could do miracles. But even one of the philosophers I quote makes the point: even direct miracles could deceive you more in some respects than our conscience. Our conscience is this intuitive, deep awareness of God's standards, and that's the arena that really needs to be changed in our lives is our moral condition.

And the conscience is, in a sense, a more direct relation to God than miracles. Miracles could be deceptions, they could be demons, they could, it could be an alien tricking you, it could be a hallucination. But your conscience is so deep and inward, and so some argue that this is the deepest kind of knowledge God's already implanted within us.

FRANK:

And it goes back to where we started on the ache. How is the conscience and the ache related?

GAVIN:

I think they are both examples of where we relate to God at the deep existential place within us. We, and I just speak from my own experience. I love arguments. In this book, I give a lot of arguments. I love the fine-tuning argument. I have a chapter on that. I love arguing for the resurrection. I've got a chapter on that.

But for me personally, the arguments are helpful, but they're not fully decisive. Where I'm actually relating to God is this more existential place. It is related to my conscience. It is related to my longing for transcendence. And just to speak from my own experience, I can't describe it fully. I just have a deep implanted awareness of God.

FRANK:

Do you consider that the witness of the Holy Spirit, Gavin? What's the, how do you describe that? What's the, what's the theological furniture that represents?

GAVIN:

I think it is in part, even prior to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which is drawing me to faith, it's in part just general revelation. So this would be Romans 1 and Psalm 19. God's made Himself clear through creation.

When I hear the leaves rustling, it's right for my mind to go to spiritual questions because God made those leaves and He made the stars and the other things that amaze me. Part of it is conscience that's in there too. That's a part of God's general revelation. But I also think there is

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the drawing of the Holy Spirit that's involved. And I would just want to encourage someone. I mean, I understand that many people go through travail and angst in working through these questions.

I just want to encourage people if they're struggling themselves and maybe they feel that, but they have doubts and questions. The promise that is so comforting for us is in Scripture, God says those who seek God, God will draw near to them. And in James, the book of James, for example, draw near to God, He will draw near to you. So if you bring all of your questions, all your doubts, and all those deep things existentially within you to God in sincere prayer.

I think the character of God is such that He will be responsive to that, and I would just want to encourage someone, He's not going to let you slip through the cracks. He's going to help you. He's going to guide you. He's going to reveal Himself more fully to you.

FRANK:

General revelation, or what we might call God's works. We have God's works and God's word. That'll get you to a God which could be the God of the Bible, but you don't know if it's Jesus. So how do you close that loop to say this isn't just a generic theistic moral God, but it's Jesus.

GAVIN:

That is where, there is a two-step movement here, I think. So you know we're arguing for God, and that does involve general revelation more. And then this is where these various arguments from history do come in for that second step to get us to Christ and to the Christian God. And my favorite of those is fulfilled prophecy. I just find it so interesting that the unfolding story of what we call the Old Testament seems so coherent.

And it's got so many texts, and I don't like to make this argument in a triumphalist way to say, "Oh, look, here's 300 texts, and it's just obvious every single one is equally forceful." I like to make it more of a cumulative argument and say, "Look at this unfolding story. Could all these texts, I mean, what generated this belief within ancient Israel of this coming Messiah and Daniel 9 and Isaiah 53 and these very specific predictions of suffering and atonement.

And the destruction of the temple and the cessation of sacrifice and so many things." And you look at the whole story unfolding together I personally regard that as very compelling, and I like to set that before people to say, "hey, can you see that this story has a lot of coherence to it, and it looks pretty plausible?"

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FRANK:

And it's all unpacked in the book, *Why Christianity Makes Sense* by my guest Gavin Ortland. Gavin, thanks for being on the show great book, and I hope it, hope it does very well because it's quite a good book. Thanks, brother. Appreciate it.

GAVIN:

Thanks for having me so much, Frank. Keep up the great work.

FRANK:

Check him out on YouTube as well, folks. Gavin Ortland, you can find him there. Many great videos on Christianity, apologetics, church history. It's all there. All right, folks. Great being with you. See you at Arizona State next Monday night. God bless.

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