

# Interview with Craig Biehl, author of **GOD THE REASON: HOW INFINITE EXCELLENCE GIVES UNBREAKABLE FAITH**

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## **Books At a Glance (Fred Zaspel)**

Hi, this is Fred Zaspel, executive editor here at Books At a Glance, we're talking today with Dr. Craig Biehl, author of *God the Reason: How Infinite Excellence Gives Unbreakable Faith*. It's a book on apologetics, a brand new book, you may have seen our review of it on the website. Today we're talking with the author, Dr. Craig Biehl. Craig, good to have you with us.

## **Craig Biehl:**

Great to be here, thank you, Fred.

## **Zaspel**

Alright, first tell us about your book, just broadly. It's a book about apologetics, of course, but what's the niche you're seeking to fill? How does your book differ from the other books on apologetics?

## **Biehl**

Well, you may be familiar that a lot of apologetics works are rather technical; sometimes they are heavily philosophical; sometimes they use great long formulas to make their case; well, what I wanted to do was to display, explain some very powerful pre-suppositional apologetic principles, but do it in a way that was not difficult. That avoided jargon, but also brought the reader faced to face with the infinite excellence of God so that it would not only be a way to immunize them against the most sophisticated arguments of unbelief, but a way to also encourage their heart by seeing the marvelous, the, amazing infinite excellence of God's perfections and how we are so dependent upon Him and who He is and what He's done that we not only derive our apologetic principles from the nature of God and His excellence, but are also incredibly blessed and built up in doing so. It's meant to be both an encouraging work as well as a work that strengthens our faith and gives us necessary ammunition to refute and respond to the most sophisticated of unbelieving arguments.

## **Zaspel**

So in a way it's an introduction to good solid theology, that is the doctrine of God, and also an introduction to apologetics as well.

## **Biehl**

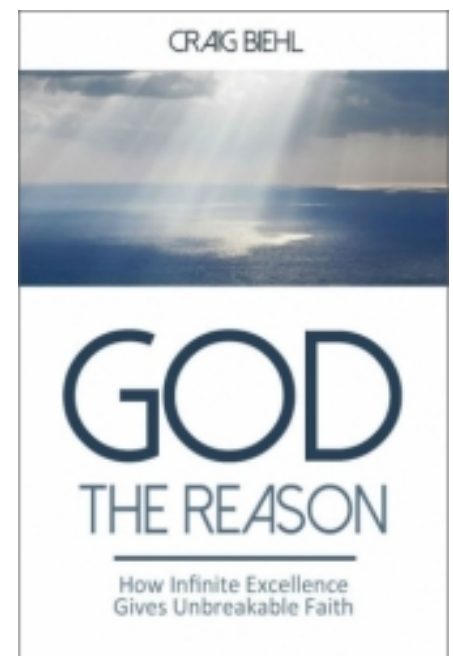
Exactly. It's a prolegomena to thinking as a believer, viewing the world as a believer, living as a believer, and as part of that, how do we respond to those who have yet to come to faith in Christ. So, yes, very much so.

## **Zaspel**

Alright, let's move on. What is apologetics for those who might be new to it, just briefly, and then how does an understanding of the attributes of God ground us for the apologetic work?

## **Biehl**

Well, apologetics is basically a defense of the faith. How do we defend our belief in Scripture as the ultimate authority, the ultimate word of God. How do we defend our faith in Christ? And from my perspective and from the perspective of many, apologetics is really geared to the believer to strengthen their faith, strengthen their assurance, strengthen their ability to interact with unbelief and not as much something that gives us the ability to have a silver bullet to bring them to faith. Of course we know that God can only do that through His word and His Spirit. So



apologetics gives us a theological framework, and it is a subset of theology, it doesn't establish theology as some might think. It doesn't establish the authority of Scripture. It derives its principles and its power from God, who has revealed Himself to us in Scripture, and gives us the wherewithal to interact with His world, with the unbelievers who are denying the obvious, living in His world, and strengthens the faith of believers. So apologetics is a defense of the faith in a manner that really strengthens the faith of believers.

So in grounding it in the attributes of God, well it only makes sense that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He created us; He created us in His image; He gave us the ability to know Him; He gave us the ability to communicate with Him; He condescended to communicate with us, and so as created and sustained by God, we depend upon God for everything. In our natural tendency we think, well, we depend on God for food and for life; but we depend upon God for all knowledge, all truth, the ability to think. Apart from Him we can know nothing, we can argue nothing, we wouldn't exist of course. So, the attributes of God give for us in apologetics the parameters of how we defend God, because we are defending the God of Scripture, we are defending God as He has revealed Himself to be, and who He is, is His attributes, His character.

So we begin with God as the source and sustainer of all things, the source and sustainer of our ability to know, what knowledge He has chosen to reveal to us, what truth he has chosen to us and the parameters of where we can go and where we cannot go in defending Him. Oftentimes people defend God by reducing God. There's ... like open theism—we can defend God just by eliminating His knowledge of the future and that sort of thing, well, we don't have that right.

The attributes of God set the parameters for us. We don't compromise who we are defending in order to defend Him. That's sort of like surrendering in order to win. It doesn't work that way. So the attributes of God are the source of everything. I mean, the overflow of His goodness, He created us, and apart from Him nothing makes any sense; apart from Him we cannot live, have our being; argue; do anything; so it only makes perfect sense, Biblical sense, that our starting point for doing apologetics would be starting with God and who God is as to His attributes.

### **Zaspel**

Alright, let's pursue that a little bit. I want to talk a little bit about your method, but I think I'm going to put that off for a little bit, let's pursue that a little bit more.

First of all explain your thesis that the existence of God is not just probable but necessary. And from there we are going to go to some specific questions as well.

### **Biehl**

Okay, that's a great question, in fact throughout the book that is an underlying thread, an underlying principle that permeates most of the book. Because apart from God nothing exists and the alternative to God—and van Til would call this arguing from the impossibility of the contrary—that apart from God you are left with what? Random chance. Or a random chance universe. And random chance produces no laws, and in a random chance universe you can have no knowledge, no truth, no science, no anything, least of all apologetics, the ability to communicate and interpret....

### **Zaspel**

Explain that for us—why can't we have science and all the other in a random universe?

### **Biehl**

Well, let's take language. In order to communicate in language you have to have a referent. So, let's say the word, "dog." We all know what a dog is because there are certain properties to being a dog: you have a tail, normally you have paws, you destroy perfectly good furniture, ruin lawns, you are happy go lucky, and everybody knows what a dog is. Well, it's because there are certain properties that are consistent, that are uniform to being a dog, to being a cat, to being a chair. Anything and everything that we use language to describe has uniform properties or properties that are specific to the description.

Well, in a random chance universe, nothing is the same from one moment to the next. There is nothing to be described. What is a dog, if from one moment to the next the molecules or the atoms or whatever constituent parts don't exist from one moment to the next or are random in their characterization or their organization in everything? So language is impossible in a random chance universe. There is nothing to speak of. And in the same way, truth is impossible in a random chance universe, because what can be true of anything when nothing is true of anything? Because nothing can be said to be true because it is never the same from one moment to the next.

So if you are a scientist—now of course that's a rather great assumption—we'll just assume that a scientist can exist in a random chance universe, because he can't. But assuming that he could, how could he conduct an experiment without uniform and universal laws in order to conduct the experiment? He would leave his home assuming he had a home and it was the same thing from one moment to the next, we'll assume that as well. How would he assume that the lab would be there, the test tubes would be there, how could you have formulas, how could you have anything to be measured, how could anything be said to be true about any experiment or any conclusion if everything changes from one moment to the next? It would be absolutely impossible. Science would be impossible in a random chance universe.

And so, it is impossible that the God of the universe, given the universe that it is, given its complexity, given the fact that it is based upon and is operating according to universal uniform laws, it is impossible that God doesn't exist. He has to exist or this world wouldn't exist as we know it.

**Zaspel**

So there's no other way to explain reality then?

**Biehl**

No. No other way.

**Zaspel**

Right.

**Biehl**

Everything is reduced to absolute absurdity. Random chance cannot explain anything as it exists in this universe. In fact, I asked an ivy league physics professor once if he could explain to me where in the universe we could point to something that was absolutely random, and he had a hard time doing that because what we might think is random is only pointing to our limitations and our inability to predict or measure something that is so complex that we may not be able to predict its outcome. It's like rolling a die or rolling dice. We could predict that outcome if we knew the exact angle, if we knew the density of the surface it was going to hit, you know, the velocity...if we knew every single variable that went into rolling the dice, we could predict the dice every single time. We think it's random just because we can't, from our limited perspective, measure every variable perfectly because we are limited.

So, to posit a random chance universe when there is nothing in the universe that's actually random chance is irrational; it is unreasonable. But again, getting to the original question, in a random chance universe you could not have anything that we have. It's impossible that the God of Scripture doesn't exist because apart from Him, we wouldn't be having this discussion. An atheist wouldn't have the wherewithal to deny the God they depend upon to exist, think, use language and do science.

**Zaspel**

Great. Absolutely.

Let's talk about it in terms of morals and morality. Explain for us what you have talked about in your book—that morality must inevitably and any discussion about morality must inevitably work back to God.

**Biehl**

Okay, that's a great question. The alternative again to God's universe and God as the creator and sustainer of all things is random chance. And in random chance you have no right or wrong. That's one approach. The other is if we take reality as it is. We take people and we say there's no God, there's no ultimate judgement, we are left with

human beings as the ultimate standard of what is true. Well, if you have seven billion human beings with the seven billion different opinions and seven billion different preferences, then where is the ultimate standard by which each opinion is judged? When everybody's opinion is equally ultimate, and there is no ultimate standard by which any opinion is judged, you are left with pure relativism which leads to ultimate skepticism and you have no basis for anything being true, necessarily true and/or right or wrong.

In fact, taking it a little further, there are discussions on the internet and discussions among philosophers going way back about natural law, and atheistic philosophers will try and talk about natural law apart from the existence of God. And you have to ask the question, where do you get natural law apart from God if you are wandering through the jungles and you meet a hungry lion or a hungry alligator? You can argue with them about natural law, but if they are hungry they are going to eat you. And you have nothing to say about it because in a world apart from God that is supposedly based upon survival of the fittest or natural selection, the more sanitized version or description of it, where's the basis of right or wrong? If you are stronger you survive. And how do you survive? In much of the world, it's by eating your neighbor if you are a lion, an alligator or whatever.

So the idea of morality apart from an ultimate standard or apart from God in an evolutionary framework is impossible. You can't have right or wrong, it's just survival of the fittest. In a random chance universe there's no absolute, everything is random. In a universe of people without God you're left with six billion opinions and no ultimate standard of right or wrong. If there's no God, you have no morality. Now, atheists and agnostics are often very moral people, but only because they borrow from the Christian world view. In their view there is no basis for right or wrong.

**Zaspel**

So every time we say "ought" or "should" we are acknowledging that behind it all is a lawgiver.

**Biehl**

That is exactly right. In fact, what you are left with without God is: whatever is, is right.

**Zaspel**

Yeah.

**Biehl**

There is no other standard to appeal to, so if it exists, therefore it is okay. And there are certain eastern religions that have absolutely just said that. Whatever is, is and whatever is, is right.

**Zaspel**

I wonder how many people there are who are actually willing to live with that.

Alright, let's talk about this in terms of reason itself. You've said that only within the Christian world view is reason itself intelligible. What do you mean by that?

**Biehl**

It gets back to the hypothetical random chance universe. So in reason, just drop it in the middle of the descriptions I gave earlier in terms of language, truth, knowledge, science – throw reason in there.

**Zaspel**

Okay.

**Biehl**

There is no reason apart from God, and if there is no God, then, well again, that we reason is presuming God's existence in the same way that saying "ought" is presuming an ultimate standard. So the fact that we reason is presuming God's existence because we are using language, we're using thought, we're using laws of logic, all of these things that are impossible apart from God. Does that help?

**Zaspel**

Yes, absolutely.

One of the approaches you like to take in your book is to take the position of the opponent of Christianity for the sake of argument. I suspect you got it from van Til, but tell us what you are doing there, and maybe give us a brief sample.

### **Biehl**

Okay. Well, too often we're ... rather than assuming their position for the sake of argument, we are granting their position for the sake of arguing with them which, in effect, just affirms their unbelieving assumptions. They are walking away thinking that they're legitimate and justified in their arguments. We don't grant that the unbelieving arguments are based on reasonable assumptions, they are based on unreasonable, blind faith assumptions. And when you go at those assumptions, you show that their reasoning is false. They are presuming things, they are presuming their own ability to know things that they can't possibly know apart from God's existence. So they presume his existence, but then deny his existence. That's a rather technical discussion.

But there are times when we can say, Okay, this is what you say, and this is what you are assuming, let's go ahead and grant that for a moment, and see where it leads. So, I gave you an example earlier of natural law, well, you guys say there is natural law apart from God. Well where does that lead? Well, okay, let's assume that we have a universe without God and go back to the lion illustration or the alligator illustration—it leads to absurdity. Or, okay, well, let's assume there's no God, but there's such a thing as truth. Well, go ahead and define truth for me apart from God. "Well, it's what science has determined." Well, what has science determined? Scientists don't always agree, scientists merely explain and define what they see, but they don't explain the ultimate source of those things.

So where do you go in terms of an ultimate truth based upon a bunch of people who are all equally limited, who have never been off the earth, to the other side of the universe, don't have any more authority than anybody else except that they can look at things maybe more deeply and explain it a little more accurately. But where do they come up with a concept of truth that transcends their own perspective and their own view? You end up with a loss of truth. So, granting that they are ultimate, where does it lead? Well, it leads to the loss of truth—that nothing can be said to be true other than what people say it is, so everything is reduced to relativism and to skepticism and you lose truth altogether.

So that's one way you can do it, just taking them that way, or morality would be another, you could just say, well, let's just say for argument's sake there's no God, and I once heard it said that somebody in a classroom raised his hand to the professor who was claiming there's no God and said, "well, if there's no God, I can do whatever I want." The professor tried to argue with the student, but let's take a look at that. The unbeliever says there's no God, there's no ultimate judgement, and if they believe in evolution, it's survival of the fittest, and if somebody can get away with murder and survive to the detriment of somebody else, why not? That's the way the wildlife world works. So you have your morality, I have my morality, but my morality may be somebody else's morality may be, well, we eat people for dinner.

### **Zaspel**

Yeah, right, and what's to tell me that your morality is better than mine. If I want to love my neighbor or eat my neighbor, who's to say it's better?

### **Biehl**

Absolutely. So, okay, that's your world view, it's evolutionary, it's survival of the fittest, we saw what happened in Nazi Germany with that type of view, we see what happens in that type of view when other people suddenly decide, hey it's better for me to go ahead and rob this bank or to have cut out of my womb this inconvenience to my lifestyle. Well, who's to say that that's wrong? We see where that leads with the latest revelations with Planned Parenthood—now we're selling baby parts. You are left with absolutely nothing but personal preference and no ultimate standard and no ultimate judgement.

If there's no ultimate judgement, then whoever has the most power subjects everybody else to their personal preference and does whatever it takes to maintain that power, and why not? It's survival of the fittest. And why not murder off the people that Nazi Germany felt it was okay to murder off because they were hurting the gene pool

because they were Jews. So that would be one example: let's just assume your world view and where does it lead? It leads to some horrific consequences.

**Zaspel**

Well, I love the title: *God the Reason*. It's not generally approached that way. I'm glad you have. We're talking with Craig Biehl, author of the new book: *God the Reason: How Infinite Excellence Gives Unbreakable Faith*. We have a great [review of it on the website](#) by Mark Farnham, you'll want to see that. Craig has also written some other books. Before we let you go, Craig why don't you tell us about some of the other things you've written.

**Biehl**

Well, I've written a book called [The Infinite Merit of Christ: The Glory of Christ's Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards](#). That's a more technical book, a more scholarly work on the theology of Edwards with respect to justification. Edwards is amazing on the topic, anything you can read from Edwards on his view of the work of Christ, the glory of Christ, his infinite excellence, please read it. If it happens to be my book, all the better, but anything that Edwards writes...

**Zaspel**

Was that your doctoral work?

**Biehl**

It was. It was my Westminster PHD thesis.

**Zaspel**

I thought so.

Alright, *The Infinite Merit of Christ*, what else?

**Biehl**

[The Box: Answering the Faith of Unbelief](#) is a small, fun little book that exposes the ultimate faith assumptions underlying all arguments of unbelief and it's through the conversations between Mr. C. and Mr. A., Mr. Christian and Mr. Atheist, and they joust in their front yard, bringing out a lot of these pre-suppositional principles. Mr. C. will ask Mr. A. "Do you know what's in this little box that I have?" and he will say, "No, I don't." So he will ask him, "Does God exist?" and he will say, "No," so then Mr. C. would say, "How did you go from being rational and admitting your limitations that you don't know is in the box, to being irrational by presuming your own omniscience that you know everything about the universe and beyond to know that God doesn't exist?" That's the work there and then the last one would be, [Reading Religious Affections](#). It's a study guide to Edwards' work. The religious affections: the nature of the new birth and the believer and that's kind of an outline study guide that can be used for small groups and bringing an outline to a rather dense book.

**Zaspel**

Oh, it is, and it's a great resource for that book, too. We've used that in our church and it's been great to have it. Alright, well, we've featured, I think all three of those books on the website. You guys all check them out. Craig, thanks for being with us, good to have you.

**Biehl**

Fred, thank you very much, I enjoyed it.

**Buy the books**



## God the Reason: How Infinite Excellence Gives Unbreakable Faith

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