

## What We Know Already, Romans 1:17-21

Portions adapted from "Why Should I believe in God?" by Scott Kircher @ SermonCentral.com

### How would you respond if someone asked you: **Do you believe in God?**

Being that you are sitting in church on a Sunday morning, I would imagine that the "yes" response here would be close to 100%. But in America as a whole, according to a 2015 Pew Research Poll, while 89% of Americans say they do think that God or some supreme being exists, if you press them on their certainty the percentage drops to 63%; the number who say that they do not believe in any god is now at 10% and climbing. So America is slowly but steadily changing into a secular nation.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/04/americans-faith-in-god-may-be-eroding/>

### What would you say if they asked you: **How do you know God exists?**

That is a little tougher question to answer. We can all give an opinion, but to support that opinion in some rational way is harder, especially when we are talking about God who hasn't made many physical appearances on the scene.

I am sure you have heard it said, or perhaps even thought it yourself, "***If God would just show Himself, then I would believe in Him.***" So while God may not have made a physical appearance in the last 2000 years, is there any other evidence pointing to His existence that can be used to help others see that there really is a God?

That is what we are going to look into this morning. In his letter to the Romans, Paul declares that, long before Jesus came on the scene to reveal his Father's love, God was already revealing His existence to us in ways that, if we wanted to see, could be plainly seen and understood. So those who claim to doubt or disbelieve in God are, as Paul would say "without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Paul writes:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who ... suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

Romans 1:17

We will get back to why anyone might want to "suppress the truth." But to begin with let's look at three ways in which, from the time of creation, God has plainly shown Himself to us.

1. God revealed Himself to us in His act of creation.
2. God revealed Himself to us in His design of creation.
3. God designed us to know and seek Him.

Let's begin with the creation.

God has revealed Himself to us  
in the act of creation.

*In the Beginning God created  
the heavens and the earth ...  
And God said let there be light and  
there was light* Genesis 1:1-3

This is how our Bible begins our story. Notice I didn't say God's story but our story. The Bible is literally God's love letter to us and part of "**God's special revelation**" (one of the many ways, like sending His son Jesus, that God has intentionally tried to reveal himself to us). But today we are looking at what is called "**God's general revelation,**" those ways that God has revealed Himself to all His creatures through that which He has created.

And as Paul noted, the first way that God showed Himself to us was in the very act of creation itself; a revelation that has become even more evident as we become more modern and scientific.

**Think about this.** Everyone since Adam and Eve had to hear the creation story as handed down from their ancestors, but just in the last few years have we been able to scientifically detect the very birth pangs of our universe; the echoes from the Big Bang.

**What is the Big Bang theory?** We are not talking about the TV show but the actual theory that our universe had a beginning; suddenly exploding into existence from essentially nothing to everything that there now is (with a really big bang).

According to Dr. Robert Jastrow, internationally known astronomer, founder and director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, professor of astronomy and geology at Columbia University, there are "*three lines of evidence: the motions of the galaxies, the laws of thermodynamics and the life story of the stars*" that all point to one conclusion—that the universe had such a beginning. So most scientists these days

now work from this theory. At one point in time our universe was not, then at the very next instant with an explosion of light it was; and it has been expanding, solidifying, and cooling since then. But this theory still bothers many.

In his book, God and the Astronomers, Dr. Jastrow writes: I am fascinated by some strange developments going on in astronomy, partly because of their religious implications and partly because of the peculiar reactions of my colleagues. The essence of these strange developments is that the universe had in some sense a beginning. That it began at a certain moment in time and under circumstances that seem to make it impossible not just now, but ever to find out what force or forces brought the world into being at that moment. Was it as the Bible says: "*Thou Lord in the beginning hath laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thine Hands?*" (Psalm 102:25)

Theologians generally are delighted with a proof that the universe had a beginning but astronomers are curiously upset. Their reactions provide an interesting demonstration of the response of the scientific mind, supposedly a very objective mind, when evidence uncovered by science itself leads to a conflict with the articles of faith in our profession. (*Science has "articles of faith?"*).

It turns out that the scientist behaves the same way the rest of us do when our beliefs are in conflict with the evidence. We become irritated; we pretend that the conflict does not exist or we paper it over with meaningless phrases.

A few scientists have bit the bullet and dared to ask: What came before the beginning? In his book, The Beginning and End of the World, British physicist Edmund Whittaker wrote, "*The scientist's pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation. This is an extremely strange development, unexpected by all but the theologians. ...for the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting here for centuries.*"  
(as quoted from "Seeing but not Believing", Calvin T. Reed, Pastor Lebanon Bible Fellowship Church, Lebanon, PA)

So, while most scientists now agree that our universe had a beginning, while having no way to discover what caused that beginning, in their rational minds it should be far easier to consider that some intelligent being was behind the cause as opposed to thinking matter and energy suddenly decided to do something itself. According to Jastrow, many scientists are resisting taking this next step of acknowledgment. To any reasoning mind, the Big Bang provides strong evidence for something or some person outside our universe that made it all happen: the uncaused causer.

Just as you can't see the wind, but you can see the effect on what it touches, so the invisible God has announced Himself to the brightest of our scientists—you might say with a real big bang. **In the beginning there was God, and then one day God said "let there be light."**

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*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork...  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world. Psalm 19:1-4*

I love the depth of understanding that the Psalmist displays here—writing so long ago—yet he knew that the stars in the sky, while having no voice that he could hear, by their very presence they still speak to us of God's creative hand. Of course now we know that the stars do have voices—still nothing that can be heard with our ears, but for the last 75 years, our modern radio telescopes have continuously monitored this music of the spheres.

And from the heavens to the earth, the same proof of design is as true for us as well as the stars. No scientist looking at the perfection of the carbon atom, the workings of a single cell, or the intricacy of the entire human anatomy can easily come to the conclusion that all this was the result of evolutionary chance. Again, now looking at his own body, the Psalmist declares:

For it was you [God] who...knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. **Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.** Psalm 139:13-14

Evidence of design indicates a designer. This brings up the third and most important point that we need to understand: **not only does our world's design point to that designer, but even more so because we were designed by Him to see the design and to know this designer.** The Bible goes as far to declare that God even placed you, in this time, in this place, in this century, because it was the best place in which to provoke you to seek after Him—and be found.

*The God who made the world and everything in it ....  
allotted [to us] the times of [our] existence  
and the boundaries of the places where [we] would live,  
so that [we] would search for God and...  
find him—though indeed He is not far from each one of us.  
For "In him we live and move and have our being"  
Acts 17:24-28 (personalized)*

In his famous speech to the intelligentsia of Greece, Paul declared:

*The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being" Acts 17:24-28.*

So you see we were designed to know God and placed where we now are to cause us to seek after God until we have found our way home to Him. Knowledge of God is built into our very being, so of course we can recognize His handiwork in creation—that is part of our programming.

**We were never neutral agents in this quest for God. God did not plunk us down on the earth and leave us to figure out things on our own, he designed us to know Him and to seek him.** Sixteenth century genius Blaise Pascale called this our "God shaped vacuum." A more modern description might be that we have an empty "God socket" built into our computer which will hinder our function and corrupt our calculations until we plug God in there.

Let me say this again and you think about it--because this has ramifications for certain other modern theories.

**We were never neutral agents in this quest for God. God did not plunk us down on the earth—"tabula rasa"—and leave us to figure out things on our own; He designed us to know Him and to seek Him. We will not be complete until we find Him.**

*For **what can be known about God is plain to [us]**, because God has shown it to [us]. Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature...**have been understood and seen through the things he has made.** Romans 1:19-20 (personalized)*

The theory of Evolution declares that humanity climbed up out of the primordial mud to evolve into what we are today; human history has seen a steady progress from the more primitive to the modern. In a similar way the theory of religion claims that our thinking, our religion, grew from fear of the unknown, to worshipping the elements, then to idols, and eventually to the idea of a singular moral god (shaped in our own image).

But right here in Romans--and in several other places in our Bibles--Paul declares that **the exact opposite is true**. We didn't evolve out of a lower form, we were created as we now are and in God's image. And we didn't grow out of idolatry to conceive of a god, we knew God at the first; but having rejected God we went downhill from there.

for though they knew God,  
they did not honor him as God  
or give thanks to him,  
but they became futile in their thinking,  
and their senseless minds were darkened.

Romans 1:21

So, the Bible teaches not that humans evolved, but that we have devolved. We started out knowing God, but when we refused to honor Him as God and became ungrateful--we didn't become enlightened (*as the serpent had promised*) we became "darkened in our thinking."

***Professing to be wise we became fools exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.... and worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator***

Romans 1:23-25 (personalized)

Which brings us the final part of today's lesson.

For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of **those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.** Romans 1:17

If what the Bible teaches is true, that all along—through His “General Revelation”—we should have known at least the reality and goodness of God, His power and His right to rule, then what went wrong? Paul wrote, that once we turned away from God it was just like walking down hill; after that first step, the next step comes quicker and easier, until pretty soon we are running down hill...and we can't stop until we reach the bottom.

So human “progression” went from knowing but rejecting God to *worshipping the creature rather than the Creator*. And from there, in our darkened and foolish thinking, ignoring our built in sense of morality—another part of our godly design (Romans 2:14-15)—we descended into all kinds of immorality eventually to the very bottom; a state of mind even lower than the animals we were put here to govern. Romans calls that state a “debased mind.” When we should have known better, we now celebrate and endorse the wrong that we were doing (Romans 1:28). These are some of the things we will be looking into in the coming weeks, but for now we need to ask one last question: **WHY?**

**What caused us to want to reject God, and how did it lead to where we are now?**

for though they knew God,  
they did not honor him as God  
or give thanks to him,  
but they became futile in their thinking,  
and their senseless minds were darkened.  
Romans 1:21

The trigger to all this was when we no longer wanted to “honor God as God,” which is how it all began in the Garden of Eden. Believing the lie that we could be our own gods, humanity began rejecting the evidence that we were not god. We did this by “**suppressing the truth.**” In other words refusing to acknowledge what we see is of God. Let's return Dr Robert Jastrow for our closing example. He writes:

*“[while] I am an agnostic in religious matters. I'm amazed by my colleagues that when they are confronted with the evidence they don't accept these things.”*

*Having said that the picture is incomplete without God [the scientist] turns around and says I don't know if there is a God. What an example. Confronted with the truth, he embraces it to some degree, and then backs away and says, "Can we really know? Can we really understand?"* (Jastrow as quoted from "Seeing but not Believing," Calvin T. Reed, Pastor Lebanon Bible Fellowship Church, Lebanon, PA)

Dr Jastrow has just chided his fellow scientists for failing to accept the obvious; all the evidence of the Big Bang which they now agree points to something or someone behind the Big Bang: the unmoved mover, the uncaused first cause, yet they refuse to name that someone "God." **Are they suppressing the truth in their own minds?** Why would they do that? Could it be because they do not want to honor God as God. Think of the havoc it will wreck upon their evolutionary theories, their humanistic sense of being masters of their own fate.

And also think about Dr. Jastrow. While remarking on his fellow scientists discomfort and refusal to accept the truth, yet he still declares himself *an agnostic in religious matters*; meaning he doesn't personally know--or want to know--anything about this god. **More suppression?** This seems to me to be the mistake of his lifetime perhaps even eternity. Dr. Jastrow died in 2008 and what he only theorized about he now knows as fact.

What about you?

What truths about God and your relationship, your responsibility, to Him are you trying to suppress?

Let's dwell on this for a moment, and then let's pray about it.