



## Thru God's Eye: Life in the REAL World

### **Is There a God? Why Does It Matter?**

Crossroads, September 25, 2011 - Mark Bickel



#### TEACHING NOTES

#### Intro:

##### Isaiah 40:21-26

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?  
He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.  
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.  
He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.  
No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground,  
than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.  
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

##### Psalms 24:1-2

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;  
for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

#### **PRAY**

- Last week we looked at the Bible claims that there is **only one God and only one way to God**, thus arguing against any view that many paths or religions can lead to the true God
- Last week we also saw that the existence of a creating and sustaining God necessarily **affects our understanding of everything in life** – can not describe or understand the broken pot on the ground without reference to the potter, and the unseen mover who smashed it on the floor
- And Finally, if there is a God, **than all knowledge must start with God** (in theological / philosophical terms – the ontological precedes and forms the foundation for the epistemological and the ethical)
- **But did not actually answer the fundamental question – IS THERE A GOD?**

## Assault on God

- **In the Past Week ...**

- **Billboard** – You do not need God to be happy
- In a public display of opposition against Christianity, a **group of atheists on Saturday tore apart photocopies of Bible verses that they view as immoral and illegal.**
  - "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up ..."
  - Bruce Gleason, who heads the group, told The Christian Post earlier that he was "doing this to make this a better world" because he felt that "reason, science, and critical thinking will do much more than prayer and belief."
- **Atheist Richard Dawkins Pens Children's Book on 'Magic' of Evolution**
  - *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True* is Dawkins' latest work attempting to explain life in terms of evolution
  - "What are things made of? Who were the first man and woman? When did everything begin?" Those are a few of the mysteries that Dawkins believes science – or "the magic of reality," as he dubs it – can thoroughly explain.
  - "When children ask 'where did I come from' they are quite capable of understanding – and being taught – evolution," Dawkins penned. "Evolution could be taught in such a way as to make it easier to understand than a myth."
  - "Reality has a grander, poetic magic of its own, which I hope I can get across," ... The author desired to share with his readers the supposed truth of evolution, which to him, was more interesting and more poetic than biblical "myths" and "hundreds of [other] creation myths from around the world."

- **The "Old Atheists"**

- **Until a few hundred years ago there were no atheists!** Society built on the assumption there was a God both behind the world and acting within the world. Science, and everything else, subject to the oversight of the church.
  - There would certainly have been functional atheists – those who claim there is a God but do not know Him or live like He is there ... but very few would have denied he exists
  - Atheism becomes a 'word' in oxford English dictionary in 16<sup>th</sup> century
- 19<sup>th</sup> century – what Mohler calls "the **4 horsemen of the modern apocalypse**"
  - Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin and Freud
    - **Friedrich Nietzsche** – Philosophy - God is Dead
    - **Sigmund Freud** – Psychology - Concepts of God all in the mind
    - **Karl Marx** – Politics - Religion is the opiate of the masses
    - **Charles Darwin** – Science – Origin of Species in Natural Selection
  - All wrote to the intellectual elite, and had a **small following** (even by 1907's only 2% of people claimed to be atheists) – but those few were in the places of influence!
  - They changed the game from a world where God was assumed and seen everywhere to one where the very existence of God could be questioned and where whole areas of life and study could be undertaken without God

- **The “New Atheists”**

- **New generation of Atheists and Atheist writers**
  - Don’t just write to the elite ... write to the people – **NY Times best sellers!**
  - More from the **science** filed that philosophy
  - **More positive**, even if they can not give reason for it (Nietsche saw that without God there was little purpose to life, new atheists not so concerned to take it to the end)
  - **Much more evangelistic** – they are trying to change the mind of all the people
  - **Much more antagonistic** – belief in God is dangerous, needs to be stopped!
- Today – what Mohler calls “the **4 horsemen of the new atheist apocalypse**”
  - Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens
    - **Richard Dawkins** – Oxford – “The Selfish Gene”, “The God Delusion” – also “Viruses of the Mind”, “A Devil’s Chaplain”, and the kids book mentioned before
    - **Daniel Dennett** – Tufts – “Darwind’s Dangerous Idea”, “Breaking the Spell: Religion as Natural Phenomenon”
    - **Sam Harris** – “The End of Faith”, “Letters to a Christian Nation” (US should be embarrassed because it is not more secular!)
    - **Christopher Hitchens** – “God is Not Great: Hoe Religion Poisons Everything”
  - For more see **R. Albert Moher’s “Atheism Remix”**
- **Mohler gives 8 summary statements about the new Atheists:**
  1. Marked by unprecedented boldness
  2. Clear and specific rejection of the Christian God of the Bible
  3. Explicitly reject Jesus Christ
    - a. Note: Danger of “God” - Impossible demands us - immoral of God to put 10 commands on us, esp. 10th since it dictates thoughts - and very immoral for God to give eternal punishment for break something I could not keep - objection to blood sacrifice, and someone else taking my place ...
    - b. But this is not objection to all religions, these features are only in Christianity
  4. Grounded in Scientific Argument
  5. Refusal to tolerate moderate or liberal forms of belief
  6. Attack on toleration
  7. Question right of parents to inculcate belief in their children
  8. Argue that religion itself must be eliminated in order to preserve human freedom
- *Seeking to change the game again, from OK to question God’s existence to **instance God does not exist and the need to eradicate the concept of God***
- **Many of us may not encounter full blown, well thought out and argued atheists, but...**
  - There is more and more pressure to remove God from all teaching, public discussion
  - There is greater emphasis on evolutionary foundation to everything ... much of which is not even shown anymore, it is just assumed
  - Humanist societies springing up on campus around the country
  - While the world argues for tolerance of other religious beliefs, if is increasingly hostile to Christianity and the God of the Bible
  - The “Child Abuse” argument is starting to be made in more prominent cases
  - People around us certainly do not assume God anymore, and many do more than just question God – they either practically deny God or they hope that he is whatever kind of God they wish him to be – not interested in seeing who he really is.

- Example: Recent Discovery Channel show called “**Curiosity**” – premier week question “**Did God Create the Universe?**” – Stephen Hawking’s describe science of universe, leading to this conclusion:
  - *Show video of last 4 minutes of show*
- **Small Groups**
  - **How do you think about this** (not what you would say, but how think)
  - **What might you say to a friend?** (if they expressed some of these ideas, asked about show)

## Defense of God

- **Classic “Theistic Proofs”**
  - **Ontological Argument** – Philosophical argument for the concept of God
  - **Cosmological Argument** – There must be some reason the universe came into existence, and there must be something before the universe that brought it into existence
  - **Teleological Argument** – Complexity of universe shows creator (2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics would say if left alone a system will move from complex to simple, not the reverse)
  - **Moral Argument** – All people believe in right and wrong, must be outside moral source
  - **Pascal’s Wager** – Better to believe in God and be wrong, than not believe and be wrong
- **Lewis’s “Arguments” for God** (see C.S. Lewis’s “Miracles”)
  - First shows we live in a supernatural world
  - Then shows that the only form of supernatural that makes sense is single God
  - Then shows that one God is the God of the Bible
  - Then goes on for remainder of book to talk about miracle
- **McDowell’s “Evidence” of God** (see Josh McDowell’s “Evidence That Demand a Verdict”)
  - Archeological, Historic, Scientific evidences for the Bible, God, Jesus, Resurrection ...
- **Keller’s “Clues” to God’s Existence** (see Timothy Keller’s “The Reason for God”)
  - **The Mysterious Bang** - why would there be something rather than nothing? Always a Cause
  - **The Cosmic Welcome Mat** – conditions for universe, life, earth, man
  - **The Regularity of Nature** – scientific theory based on ordered, consistent universe
  - **The Clue of Beauty** – music, nature, art ... longing for joy, love, beauty beyond what we can experience in this life– feel like more than naturalistic impulses of the brain! (ex. Romance)
  - **The Clue-Killer ... as Clue** – Naturalist argues these are all imaginings of mind for some evolutionary advantage (new atheists argue it was an advantage some time in the past, now a disadvantage). BUT if all our thoughts, feeling, understanding of the world simple conditioned response needed for survival and not to be trusted ... isn’t the theory of evolution by definition in the same boat, and thus equally as suspect as religion ... and at least as equally likely to be true or false as God?
  - **Morality** - (come back to next week)
- **Could look at and say much more ...** But in the end none of these are the primary or most persuasive argument, and as helpful as some of them are, none of these will ever truly convince anyone!

## **Recommended Reading** (band can come forward)

"Atheism Remix" by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

"The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism" by Timothy Keller

"Miracles: How God Intervenes in Nature and Human Affairs" by C. S. Lewis

"Evidence That Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell

## **All Men Know There Is a God! - Romans 1:18-20**

*18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world 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.*

- **What may be known about God – PLAIN to men**
  - **Not hidden**, not seen by some – PLAIN, visible, understandable to all men
  - So **easy to see and understand** that God can rightfully call to account any who do not recognize him
  - Notice verse 18 – **wrath of God** ... because we suppress obvious truth!
  - Many think **on judgment day** they will say to God "Why did you not show yourself more clearly" – instead God is going to say "I made myself plain, why did you not believe!"
- **God's invisible qualities seen**
  - Again, we argue how can I believe in a **God I can not see** ...
  - God says his **invisible qualities** can be seen by all ...
  - Not just seen, but **seen and understood** ...
  - Enough to be **without excuse**
  - What are those invisible qualities
    - **Eternal power** – was, is, is to come ... all powerful creator & sustainer
    - **Divine nature** – is God by nature, is self-existent, is ultimate
  - That is what we should see when we look at **Creation**!

## **All Men Suppress That Truth - Romans 1:21-25**

*21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

- **Knew God ... But refused to give glory and thanks**
  - Again, truth not hidden – **they Knew God**
  - **But decided not to glorify or thank him** ...
  - **Why?** Why would we not glorify and thank God?
    - If we admit there is a God we also have to admit we are not!
    - If there is a creator, he has a right to be who He is not who I want him to be
    - If he created me, he has a right to dictate my life, whether I like it or not
    - Even the act of thanking God would need to be done his way! (see Cain and Abel)
    - Huge implications to acknowledge there is a God!

**21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.**

- So instead our **thinking becomes futile** and our **foolish minds are darkened**
  - Our whole way of looking at and thinking about the world becomes false, **a groping in the dark, a futile attempt to understand** ... because we have denied the fundamental truth of God that underlies everything
  - **John 3:19-20**  
*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but **men loved darkness** instead of light because their deeds were evil. **Everyone who does evil hates the light**, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*
- **Claiming to be Wise they Became Fools**
  - **Psalms 14:1, 53:1**  
*The fool says in his heart,  
"There is no God."  
They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;  
there is no one who does good.*
  - All these atheists we read about claim to be wise, and the world has acknowledged them as that ... **But God's verdict is they are fools!**
  - Know matter how much they have advanced science ... they have missed the fundamental, most basic, most obvious point – **it all points to God!**
- **Exchanged Glory of God**
  - **Ancient cultures**, and some around the world today, make carved idols to represent the Gods – some in human forms, some in animal forms, some like the sun, moon and stars ... But all of those are corrupt substitutes for the real God,
  - and they are all **gods that are mortal**, for this life only, not immortal
  - **But we do the same** – science, even religion, carves out pictures of some god, be it nature itself or some force or any god other than the God of the Bible, that are merely mortal images and corrupt copies of the real God
  - **When we worship any of these images we are by definition exchanging the glory and immortality of the real God for these worthless idols**

**Note: even they know it:**

"The reasonable view was to believe in spontaneous generation; the only alternative, to believe in a single, primary act of supernatural creation. There is no third position. For this reason many scientists a century ago chose to regard the belief in spontaneous generation as a "philosophical necessity." ... "Most modern biologists, having reviewed with satisfaction the downfall of the spontaneous generation hypothesis, yet unwilling to accept the alternative belief in special creation, are left with nothing. (George Wald, Nobel Laureate and Prof. of Biology at Harvard, "The origin of life" *Scientific American* August 1954 p.46)

"Evolution [is] a theory universally accepted not because it can be proven by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible."  
(Professor D.M.S. Watson, leading biologist and science writer of his day.)

*24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 **They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.***

- **Exchanged Truth of God**
  - **Again, it is an exchange – now truth for a lie** – there really is truth, and God is that truth ... anything else is a lie and is incompatible with the true God
- **Worship and Serve Created Things**
  - **Studying the cosmos** ... or the world of microbiology ... or the environment ... or animals ... or societies ... or people themselves is great – **BUT all of these need to lead to worshiping and serving God!**
  - If they ever lead **to worshiping and serving the created thing** we are in trouble!
  - Here is where so much science, environmental concern, social concern goes bad – it **becomes a worship of the cosmos or animals or self rather than God**
  - **What is the correct response to everything around us – not just seeing and understanding God – but Worshiping and Serving the creator who is forever praised!**
- **Romans 1 goes on to say ...**
  - *28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*
  - *32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*
  - And then it describes God's response to our rejection of Him ... which we will come back to in 2 weeks when we look at the problem of evil

**So what do we do with all this?**

## **Implications of Romans 1 for our Thinking**

### ***How do you view God***

- As you walk through life do you “see God” everywhere – all creation screaming God’s existence
- How do you define wise? What kind of wisdom are you seeking – is it to know God?
- **Proverbs 9:10**  
*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*
- Are you wise enough to acknowledge God, get to know Him as He is, and bow before Him?

### ***How do you view / think about people around you***

- Only two kinds of people – wise and fool – nothing in between
- And definition of wise and fool is who sees, understands, fears, worships, serves God!
- No matter how wise any person or theory sounds, if not based on God, it is corrupt
- People will be given to worshiping and serving the creation rather than the creator – do not follow them down that path!

## **Applications of Romans 1 of our Life**

### ***How do you interact with people around you***

- Do you believe all creation reveals God?
  - Don't be ashamed or embarrassed to talk about God – and in truth / absolute terms
  - Point out to people where you see God in creation ... cultivate a lifestyle of not just seeing God but talking as if He is there
- Do you believe that they already know there is a God?
  - If so you can speak with them boldly, knowing somewhere it will ring true (they may not acknowledge that, but Romans says it's true)
  - You can also ask the type of questions, tap into things in their life that will help them see their need for God
  - The various proofs and evidence and clues can be helpful in a conversation, but in the end they are not what will win the person over – take them to nature and to scripture and unapologetically show them the true God!
- Do you believe their foolish hearts are darkened?
  - Then don't be discouraged if they reject the truth – they have been doing that all their lives!
  - Don't assume you can change them ... only God can do that ...
  - So be encouraged, even if they show no outward signs God may be working in their heart!

### ***How do you approach / get to know the true God yourself***

- Does creation, people, your life lead you to glorify?
- Does it lead you to love and serve God?

### ***Ultimate Application for each person - Worship our Creator!***

## **PRAY**

## **Grandeur of God and His Creation (let this lead us into worship)**

**Video: “Creation Calls – Are You Listening”** (downloaded from [TheBranch.org](http://TheBranch.org), also available on YouTube)

Music by Brian Doerksen, video from “Planet Earth” DVD used with permission of the BBC

**Is There a God?**

**Page 8**