

“What We All Know About God” //

Romans 1:18–25 // *Unknown God* #1

Introduction

Happy Almost Easter. Palm Sunday. **ROMANS 1.**

Today we begin a new 3-week series called “Unknown God” in which we’ll explore what the Bible says about the existence of God.

One of the things you might notice if you are paying attention to culture is that **atheism seems to be making a small comeback.**

Over the last **decade or so a new set of articulate, aggressive spokesmen have emerged**, called “the New Atheists.” They consist of people like “the **4 Horsemen**” of the apostasy apocalypse—Hitchens, Dawkins, Harris and Dennett, and also include more cultural icons and talk show hosts like **Bill Maher, Bill Nye the Science Guy and Ricky Gervais.**

*Let me walk you through a little cultural history I learned recently:*¹

- **Right after 9/11** interest in religion surged in this country.
 - A lot of people went back to **church or synagogue** and talked about our country’s need for God.
- At the same time, **Sam Harris** began writing a book called, *The End of Faith*, in which he said that **religion was not the solution** to our problem, it was the problem itself.
 - Interesting aside: He **offered the manuscript to a dozen publishers** but no one wanted to touch it. He finally found one, after it was published it spent 33 weeks on the *NYT* Best Sellers list.
- **After this he wrote a book** called, *Letters to a Christian Nation*, which basically said, “Generally religious people are not the

problem; *you*, Summit Church kind of people—people who take their faith seriously), you are *the main problem.*”

- That same year **Richard Dawkins** came out with a book called “*The God Delusion.*” He said faith in God is stupid: evolution has mitigated any need for God; a loving God would rule the world differently; religious people are mean. **Dawkins said about this book:** *My goal is that “religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.”*
- The next year the late **Christopher Hitchens**, my favorite modern atheist, published a book called, *God is not Great*. He did the same thing; he tried to show that belief in God was not necessary and that religion itself created the problems in our society.

All these books were **best sellers!**

But here is **where the sociological analysis** gets interesting. The **popularity of this stuff** has not led to a surge in belief in pure atheism. That number statistically did not increase that much.

What has surged was the number of people who began to disconnect from all religion.

- In fact, **so many people have done this that** there is actually a **name** for this group now, “**The Nones.**” (You have to be **careful how you spell it.**) **PICTURE of nun and a millennial**

On the census, when you are asked to **identify your religious affiliation**, they choose “*none.*”

- They currently at about 23%, up from 16% in 2007 and 7% in the 1990’s.
 - In 25 years, they’ve tripled—almost unheard of statistically!
- And this number will **probably only increase.** 35% of millennials put themselves in this category, with that number heavily weighted toward males.
- Most “nones” would say, “*We’re not hostile toward a spiritual faith in God, we are just done with organized religion.*”

¹ From Andy Stanley, *Atheism 2.0*

- OR **another way of saying it:** It's not that they have *found atheism that attractive*, just that they find any kind of *organized* religion or religious confession unattractive.
- **And they say, "If there is a God,** I'm not sure we can really know that much about him, and if you claim to know something you're just going to become a bigot.
 - So, you relate to god in your way, and I'll relate to him in mine."

(BTW, for some of you **this is encouraging**, because you **finally know what category** you belong to... You're a none! You can **call your mom** today and tell her, "Mom, I'm a none." But, again, you **really need to make sure you spell it for her, though.**) (PUT UP PIC FROM FN2 again)

Here's a question: Why is the existence of God a question at all? For something as important as God, **why should it require faith?**

- **My kids don't** have to believe, by faith, that I, their daddy, exists. I don't have to say, "I know **sometimes you'll doubt** my existence. **When you do**, recite this: "J.D. is my daddy, I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in warm blankets, my sippy cup runneth over."
- No, my kids are never in doubt. Why **should our relationship with God** be any different?

I want to show you for the next 3 weeks what the Bible says about faith in God—what we can know and **how** we know it and what faith really is.

I also want to show you how the God many people have rejected is actually a made-up god who didn't exist.

- **They rejected this false view of God thinking it was the Christian God, and in the process** ended up missing the real God.
- But you'll **have to come back** on week 3 for that.

Summit: this is going to be a little different series of messages for us.

- I'm not going to just open up texts of Scripture and go through them. Think of this like **one 3-week-long sermon**, where we'll spend time in the text one week other weeks really digging into the questions.
- To get the main idea, you're going to have to be here for all three weeks.
- *Warning: About once a year because of where I live, I am committed to getting geeked up and preaching a **total nerd sermon**. This is that week, so I hope you brought your intellectual big boy pants this weekend. (ALSO good time to point out transcripts online)*

For today, let's begin here in Romans 1, where Paul explains where unbelief comes from: ¹⁸ For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, ¹⁹ since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse... ²⁵ And they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever.

3 points Paul makes here in these verses:

1. *What may be known about God is evident.*
2. *Our belief problems ultimately go back to heart problems.*
3. *The opposite of faith in God is not atheism, it is idolatry.*

I'll spend most of our time on the 1st. Paul says...

1. What may be known about God is evident.

According to Paul, certain things about God are self-evident. We automatically recognize them and INSTINCTIVELY know them.

If we stop recognizing them, it's because something has distorted our view (which we'll get to at the end).

- I'm **not saying people don't sincerely believe in atheism**, just that there's always *something that causes them* to turn their backs on what are rather obvious indications that there is a God behind creation.
- Don't think of these as proofs, *per se*, just strong hints.

— *If there's no God, there's no you* (*build on TV)

If **there is nothing more than biology**, chemistry and physics, there is no "you" in there. **You have a brain**, yes, but no real mind within the brain.

Earlier this year I read a book about **Christopher Hitchens' final days**.² In 2010 he was diagnosed with a really aggressive cancer, and as it settled on him that he was going to die, **he wrote a book chronicling his last thoughts**. The book was called **Mortality**. Some of the chapters are only a sentence long.

- In it, he talked about **how his doctors kept telling him**, *"Christopher, your **body is fighting the cancer**. Your body is **trying**. **It doesn't want to give up**."* He finally said to his doctors, *"I don't have a body. I am a body."*³
- And **if biology is all there is**, he's right. **There is no J.D.** *There is just this stuff (flesh).*

Now, LET ME ASK YOU: Does that jive with you? That there's no real you—that your consciousness—your sense of self—is just an illusion of the synapses of the brain?

Because here's what that means—if biology is all there is, then death is the absolute end of it all!⁴

This idea alone may not prove that God exists, but it convinces many people that something doesn't sit right with an atheistic approach.

- I've told you before about Steve Jobs, Apple's iconic CEO, who **told an interviewer on 60 Minutes** shortly before he died that throughout his life he had sometimes believed in God, and sometimes hadn't. But after he was diagnosed with cancer, he found himself *wanting to believe*. *It can't be that when we die, he said, it all just **fades to black**. All the wisdom we've accumulated as a race, all of our accomplishments—somehow have to live on.* (Incidentally, that's why he **never liked to put on/off switches** on Apple devices. He didn't like the idea of being able just to flip a switch and shut something off.⁵)
- **The point is, he knows something is off**
- **Compare Hitchens' account of his final days** with that Shawna, a girl in our church with Cystic Fibrosis in our church I've told you about before. She passed away a few weeks ago. For a while she might have been the **greatest evangelist** in our church. I can't **remember ever being** in the presence of another person who exuded such consistent serenity and joy. She told the doctors and nurses on her floor and anyone else who would listen that what she was going through was nothing compared to what God had prepared for her in eternity. People would come in her room and say they didn't understand why she was being cut down in the prime of our life—she would say, *'I'm headed to the prime of my life!'* Our lives, whether we

⁴ A famous atheist of the last century, **Bertrand Russell**, said just before his death, *"When I die, I will be consumed by darkness. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere, life is only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."*

⁵ *"Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don't. I think it's 50-50 maybe. But ever since I've had cancer, I've been thinking about it more. And if I find myself believing a bit more...maybe it's because I want to believe in an afterlife. That when you die, it doesn't just all disappear. The wisdom you've accumulated, somehow it lives on. But sometimes I think it's just like an on-off switch. Click and you're gone."* Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2011), 571.

² Larry Taunton, *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens*

³ Christopher Hitchens, *Mortality*

live 20 years or 120, are only **small drops of water** compared to the expansive beauty of eternity's ocean. It seemed for a while like every week I met new people impacted by her testimony.

- Again, "**Does her hopefulness prove** that God exists?" No, it doesn't. But it shows you that atheism goes contrary to a yearning inside of us that we have that suggests we are more than biology.
- **C.S. Lewis famously explained it like this:** *A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.*⁶
- What may be known about God, Paul says, is **evident to us**.
- **Even Hitchens**, as he approached death, began to question a lot of things and had this real struggle because of the consistent kindness (demonstrated by Taunton's adoption of a special needs girl) and hope demonstrated to him by a Christian friend—read it in the book *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens*.⁷

Here's a 2nd idea...

— **If there's no God, there's no free will**

(if you're a none, you must wrestle with this...)

If **all we are is biology and chemistry**, then our behavior in any situation is solely due to what our genes and chemicals in us compel us to choose. **Even when we think we're acting freely**, it's only because some chemical construct in our minds pushes us to act that way, *because there is no "us" behind it all, there is only this (flesh)*.

- I'll give you an **example**: On his podcast, **Sam Harris was** complaining about people taking him out of context and misquoting him. But then he said this, "**You know, I can't be**

critical, they had no choice." They're just acting in accordance with their genes.

- **BECAUSE there is no freedom**. There is no free will.
- That means that **every decision you've ever made is an illusion**.

Again, does that **jive** with you? Does that approach to life **work**?⁸

- **I once heard a scientist** explain that people who committed rape were just carrying out the pre-programmed instincts their DNA had built into them. He said, **Ethically, that repulses me, but scientifically, we can't deny that certain people are programmed by evolution to pursue this as a way of propagating their species.**⁵
- **But we know that's not true!** We know that the person who acts on the impulse to rape **ought to be held responsible** for that choice and ought not have their behavior simply explained away as genetics and chemical out-workings.

You cannot live as if you are just biology. If you try that you will be locked up by other biology.¹⁰ It doesn't work...

A third thing...

— **If there's no God, there's no true worth—only ascribed value**

- If we are **just biology and chemistry**, nothing actually has real, inherent value; there's just **value we ascribe** to things because we find them useful.

If you're a "none," *you have to consider this*, because this is a **really big deal**, especially when it comes to something like **JUSTICE**.

- If we are only biology and chemistry, there's no such thing as true justice, only **useful strategies** for preserving our kind.
- For atheists, a statement like, "**You truly ought to**" or "ought not to" doesn't really have any meaning.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chap 10, "Hope."

⁷ See Larry Taunton, above.

⁸ **Steven Hawking** admitted, "*I have noticed that even people who claim that everything is predestined and we can do nothing to change it look before they cross the road.*"

⁹ Interview on PBS, 2004.

¹⁰ Phrase from Andy Stanley, *Atheism 2.0*.

- (This **doesn't mean they can't be moral**, just that their morality lacks a consistent intellectual foundation.)
- **The only way we can say that something is unjust** is if we appeal to a **higher vision of how it ought to be.**
 - **MLK said the reason segregation laws in America were unjust was because they conflicted with the higher laws of God.**¹¹
- **We agree.** We look at oppression and say, "That's wrong because it's not **supposed** to be like that."
- But if there's nothing higher than biology and chemistry, you can't say that. There is no "**supposed to.**"
 - **In fact, according to the laws of evolution, the only reason our species** is here because they violently beat out all the others. That's **survival of the fittest.** Our species won the hunger games.
- This is a **particular problem for "nones"**, because when it comes to religion "nones" love to say, "I have my truth you have your truth," but they **don't want to say that when it comes to justice.** "Well, **you have your justice** and I have mine."
 - Because they believe in **basic human rights: Murder, oppression, and sexual assault are wrong in every culture.**
 - We **don't want to hear about the abuse of women or gassing of children** in Syria and have someone say, "Well, that's **just how things are over there.**"
 - We say, "No. That **oppression is wrong in all places and all times.**"
- So, again, there's **something in the atheistic approach** that just doesn't work.
- **FWIW, C. S. Lewis** said that this was what ultimately brought him to see that there had to be a God. He **had been an atheist**, and his **biggest objection to belief in God** was all the **injustice** in the universe. **In the end, however,** he realized that injustice was more of a problem for him as an atheist: **My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of "just" and "unjust"? . . . What was I comparing this**

universe with when I called it unjust? . . . (I'll paraphrase this next part: *If the evolutionary process was solely responsible for life, it meant that there was no such thing as universal justice, only things I saw as personally beneficial.*) **But when I said that, then my argument against God collapsed too – for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies... Consequently atheism turned out to be too simple.**¹²

If there's no God, there's no such thing as worth, only ascribed value, which means there's no such thing as true, moral evil and injustice.

That also means there's **no such thing as beauty or love.** When you behold beauty, you have to say, **like Richard Dawkins,** 'Well, the reason I find that beautiful is because my ancestors believed there was food out there... and that impulse helped them survive, and they passed down that neurological feature to me which is why I find that beautiful."

And I hear them explain that and I think, "really?" *Those stars or that sunset I find so beautiful somehow reminds me subconsciously of Twinkies?*

- **Those feelings of romance**—or your love for your kids or your parents—is merely a conditioned response evolved in your genes that enable you to propagate your DNA into society faster than your neighbors?
- **Try putting that on a greeting card on Valentine's Day:** "On this very special day, my genes are releasing chemical compounds into my bloodstream because they have been cultivated through centuries of evolution to see you as particularly useful for the propagation of my DNA into the next generation!"
- Listen, if **you really believe that,** I'm impressed with your intellectual consistency. But I'd advise you to downplay that perspective on Valentine's Day.

¹¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."
https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.

- Listen: *You can't prove your love for someone exists by biology, but you know it is real. But **if there is no God** and we are only chemistry and biology, then beauty and love are simply illusions.*

Here's a third problem new atheism runs into:

— *If there's no God, something came from nothing*

This is the most basic question of all: "Why is there something rather than nothing?"

- In *God Delusion*, Dawkins admits this is a problem. He says, **"Cosmology is waiting on its Darwin."**
 - In other words, he thinks that while they have explained how life took shape on the earth, he admits they still have no idea where life itself, or the materials that produced life, came from.
 - We need a theory, he says, as to why anything exists.
 - **Because it is self-evident that nothing x nobody** can't equal **everything**.
- Dawkins says, "Darwin's theory works for biology, but not for cosmology (or, ultimate origins)."
- Then he says, *But don't worry. We'll figure it out eventually.*¹³ *That's what we call a **blind faith leap!***

Add to that what **scientists have pointed out** about the **sheer improbability** of the complexities of life forming out of a mute, unguided chaos.

- Even **the most basic molecules and DNA strands** are incredibly complex, enough so that you wonder, "*How could a cosmic accident ever result in the digital elegance of a DNA strand?*"
- It's like thinking **an explosion in an ink factory** accidentally produced the collected works of Shakespeare.

¹³ <http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/religion-and-spirituality-god-delusion/1886.aspx> (The author here seems to be summarizing Dawkins' ideas into a more casual formulation that Dawkins himself used in the book itself. "We'll figure it out eventually," though, accurately represents the tenor of his argument regarding cosmology.)

In recent years, **scientists have made a big deal out of how finely tuned** our universe seems to be to sustain life. They call it the "anthropic principle," and it states that there are multiple factors that are **so precise** that if they were off by even a hair, life could not exist.

- **For example, and this is just one of many:** ((**The makeup of our atmosphere.** GRAPHICS: (78% Nitrogen, 21% Oxygen, 0.5% Argon, 0.03% Carbon Dioxide.))) *Notice any difference in these?*
- Yet it's the **difference between life and death**. **If some of those levels were even slightly off**—for example, CO2 were just a little higher (let's say, 3%) or a just a little bit lower (say, 0.01%), then the earth would either become an oven or have no atmosphere at all.¹⁴
 - Or if the level of oxygen dropped by 6% we would all suffocate; if it rose by 4%, our planet would erupt into a giant fireball, or¹⁵ **PIC OF EARTH EXPLODING***
- **And then there's the placement of our planet and it's tilt:**
 - ~~The distance we are from the sun is just right for life to exist. Any closer we'd burn up, any farther we'd freeze.~~
 - And **THE TILT: The earth is tilted at 23 ½ degrees**. This is even less forgiving than the distance of the sun. A few degrees different and life would be impossible. **PIC OF EARTH EXPLODING***
- ~~**Then there are the properties of gravity and how it works with the electromagnetic fields:** If the force of gravity were even slightly stronger, all stars would be blue giants; if even slightly weaker, all would be red dwarfs. In neither case would life exist.~~¹⁶
- ~~**Then there are the unique properties of the water molecule**~~
 - ~~First, we're one of the few known planets with water, which is not only necessary for life and but necessary to stabilize temperatures on our planet. If our planet was not mostly~~

¹⁴ <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/Astro/atmohab.html>

¹⁵ I.e. moved from 21% to 25% or 15%.

¹⁶ Brandon Carter, "Large Number Coincidences and the Anthropic Principle in Cosmology", in M. S. Longair, ed, *Confrontation of Cosmological Theories with Observational Data* 1979 p. 72. See Alvin Plantinga, Class Lecture, "Two Dozen or So Theistic Arguments." https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/two_c_ozen_or_so_theistic_arguments.pdf

~~water, our temperature would fluctuate several hundred degrees each day.~~

- ~~And, this is even better:~~ The **water molecule** is the only molecule whose solid form (ice) is less dense than its liquid form.¹⁷ Which means that when it freezes it floats. If ice did not float, it would sink to the bottom and the whole ocean would eventually freeze from the bottom up and we would all die.
- **One more. Jupiter just happens to shield us from 99% of asteroids.** If Jupiter didn't exist and in the placement and orbit it is in, scientists predict that there would be 10,000 the number of asteroid strikes right here on earth. **Jupiter is the Kennedy Meeks of planets**, setting picks on the asteroids so the earth can be open for the 3-pointer of life.

There are many others. Scientists say that **the odds of a planet like earth existing** are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all 'just happened' defies common sense. It's **like tossing a coin every second** and having it come up heads for 10 billion years in a row.¹⁸

The **greatest miracle of all time—if you believe in miracles**—without any close seconds, is the existence of life on our planet!¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.reference.com/science/ice-less-dense-water-30229a2a6d37efde>

¹⁸ Eric Metaxas, *Miracles*. Back in 1966, Carl Sagan, a famous atheist, posited that there were two factors needed for life to exist—the right kind of star and a planet the right distance from that star. Based on that, scientists expected billions of such planets to exist. But scientists gradually began to realize that Sagan's estimate was too small. His 2 parameters became 10, then 20, then 50. Now it's at 200. We've looked all throughout the universe, and haven't found any that meet more than a handful of these.

¹⁹ "Some thinkers claim that none of this ought to be thought surprising or as requiring explanation: no matter how things had been, it would have been exceedingly improbable. (No matter what distribution of cards is dealt, the distribution dealt will be improbable.) This is perhaps right, but how does it work? and how is it relevant? We are playing poker; each time I deal I get all the aces; you get suspicious: I try to allay your suspicions by pointing out that my getting all the aces each time I deal is no more improbable than any other equally specific distribution over the relevant number of deals. Would that explanation play in Dodge City (or Tombstone)?" Alvin Plantinga, Class Lecture, "Two Dozen or So Theistic Arguments."

Just so you know, these are not the conclusions of pastors who double as amateur scientists: The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many (precise ratios), like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life." **Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time***²⁰

Paul's way of saying that is: What can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. Romans 1:19

- Factors like this have driven **many entrenched atheists** to conclude that there's no way to avoid the conclusion that an intelligent Creator stands behind life. **In his late 70s, Antony Flew** one of the 20th Century's most famous philosophers, **stunned the philosophical world** by announcing that he had begun to believe in God. If you are not into philosophy, you may not realize what a big deal this actually was. It would be like **Rush Limbaugh** suddenly declaring that he is a Democrat, or **Mike Krzyzewski** declaring himself to be a UNC fan.
- **Flew said he just didn't** see any other compelling explanation for the complexities of design in creation. For years, he had tried to make peace with it, but it just couldn't be that the wonderful, beautiful complexity and intelligence of life emerged from a **mute chaos**. There had to be, as **Thomas Edison** said, "a captain on the bridge.")

These things are self-evident. They function like a **voice constantly speaking to us**, pointing us to our Creator.

- **Don't think of them as proof**, but indicators.
- In the same way that **if you heard a voice speaking to you from behind a door** that called your name and asked you something personal about your life, you would assume it was a person

https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/two_dozen_or_so_theistic_arguments.pdf

²⁰ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, 125. In the (), he says "fundamental numbers."

speaking and not just an illusion created by the wind, even if you couldn't scientifically prove that. It would **just be natural, common sense**.

- That's what **Paul says is true about creation**. The natural response is to think an intelligent Creator of great power is behind it.

So, if all these things would be enough to convince people there is a God behind the voice, why do some people deny it?

2. Our belief problems* go back to *heart* problems.

(*Our deafness to the voice)

Let's read our passage again: **For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who *by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*,¹⁹ since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them.**

Romans 1:18–19

- **Our problem is not that the evidence for God** is insufficient; there's something off with our hearts.
- **Our hearts, Paul explains**, are bent on exalting themselves rather than God, which blinds us to obvious truths about God.
- Let me give you some examples. **I once was in an audience when a student asked Dr. Ehrman**, "Is there anything that would cause you to regain your faith?" In response, he quoted a passage from his book, **God's Problem**: "*I think that if, in fact, God Almighty appeared to me and gave me an explanation (for all the evil in the world)*, and the explanation was so overpowering that I actually could understand, then I'd be the first to fall on my knees in humble submission and admiration.*"²¹
- **What's he assuming in that statement?** That if God had a purpose for a situation Ehrman would be smart enough to

immediately perceive it, and *that if he can't see it*, there's not one there.

- **But let me ask you to consider this** (and I've asked you this before)—**How much greater is God's wisdom than ours?**
- **Well, let's consider that by comparison**: How much greater is God's power than ours?
 - If there is a God behind the universe, he created everything there is, including the 3000 billion trillion stars, each of which, puts out on average the same wattage as a trillion megaton bombs, every second.
 - **I've told you that my personal ability to generate energy is not quite as impressive**. I bought a rowing machine that measures how many watts of electricity I produce during an exercise session. (I'm not sure what the purpose of that function is other than to humiliate me. Total meters rowed, total calories burned—that makes sense. But do people really care about their *wattage* output?) As I was thinking about this book, I got the **brilliant idea to see how many output watts** I could generate giving it everything I had for a two-minute stretch. **320**. At least, that's what they told me when they revived me. That's **enough to power five household lightbulbs** for about the same amount of time it took me to explain this illustration.
 - *3000 billion trillion trillion-megaton-bombs-per-second-energy-producing-nuclear-spheres vs. five energy-efficient lightbulbs for two minutes.*
 - And **not only did he create all that power**, he sustains it all and holds them all in his hands: I can barely lift the corner of my mattress over my head. (Ever tried to do that?) I can only do that if I wear a **back brace** and take off the rest of the day.

Now think about this. *If God's wisdom is as high above ours as his power is above ours, do we really think we can **immediately perceive** every purpose an all-wise God might have?*

- **You know, it's rather ridiculous when you think about it**: We imagine a God of omnipotent power but with a brain no bigger

²¹ Ehrman, Bart D. *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question: Why We Suffer*. New York: HarperOne, 2008, 153. Emphasis mine.

than ours—a God with **huge, universe-moving muscles** and a teeny-tiny head.

- The **problem with skeptics like Ehrman is that they have exalted themselves and their wisdom** and diminished the wisdom of God.²²

Sometimes the suppression is more subconscious than that. It's just that our hearts are disposed to self-glorification and self-control and we resist anything that challenges that.

- It's kind of like the way **people's biases** affect how they interpret evidence. Ever notice **how Republicans and Democrats can look at the exact same evidence** totally different? Something gets reported and the Democrat sees, for example, clear evidence of Republican corruption and the Republican can see clear evidence of media bias?
- That's because **how we interpret evidence** is often related to the biases of our heart.
- **Well, again, Paul says (Romans 1:18–19)** that our hearts are disposed to self-glorification and self-control and we **resist anything** that challenges that, which makes us blind to clear and compelling evidence for our Creator.
- **Keller:** College students who quit believing in God: How long have you been sleeping with your boyfriend/girlfriend? The two almost often goes together. You didn't run into an intellectual problem; you indulged in a moral problem that developed into an intellectual problem. It's usually the heart that guides the mind, not the mind the heart.

I always thought **this statement from Jesus** was really provoking: **John 5:44, How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?**

One final point I'll make from Romans here before I close, because it sets us up for weeks to come...

²² This is an excerpt from my new book *Not God Enough: Why Your Small God Leads to Big Problems*

3. The opposite of faith is not atheism, it is *idolatry*.

Go back to vs. 25 quickly: ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever.

No person ever quits believing in God, they just **substitute** something into his place.

We are **created so that we exalt** something in our lives—we'll find something that we will treat like God; something we will depend on, magnify, and look to, to fulfill us and sustain us.

- Guys like Ehrman and Harris **replace the majesty of God's intellect** for the majesty of their own.
- OTHERS, **maybe less intellectual**, neglect God and look to **money**, or **power**, or their **career**, or **family**, to provide security and meaning and permanence to them.
 - So, God becomes **uninteresting or irrelevant** to them.
 - Has that **been happening to some of you?**

But **all of these are gods** that cannot sustain or satisfy us.

- **Money disappoints** or sprouts wings and flies away.
- **Relationships** disappoint us.
- We **get old and die**.
- Our **intellect** fails us.
 - **When people are so confident in what academics** or science tells them I always ask (please don't hear this as intellectual, I got my Ph.D.), *"Has any generation ever looked back at those who lived 200 years before them and marveled at their wisdom and scientific sophistication? No, we wonder how people back then could have been so blind and stupid. Do we really think that people 200 years from now will look back and think we had it all together? No, what we think is so absolutely certain today likely will be disdained by people in the future.*

- They'll say: "Can you **believe grandpa** believed that?" *It's not something to build your hope on.*

Conclusion

All gods will ultimately disappoint us and fail us.

We were created by God, for God—for his glory and for his purposes.

And when you realize that, you turn your attention toward God and realize that his **voice has always been there**, speaking to you, calling out to you.

One of the most **riveting movie scenes I've ever seen is from the 1997 movie *Contact***, starring Jodi Foster and Matthew McConaughey. **Dr. Ellie Arroway**, played by Foster, is an astronomer who has spent years searching for signs of extra-terrestrial life.

- Well, after years and years of endless silence, she tunes her sensor to a dark, unexplored sector of deep space.
- Then, **she hears it**—the unmistakable sound patterns of communication. **Someone was trying to speak. To her!** The message was focused, deliberate, and personal.

Coming to believe in God is a little bit like that. Not in the "I hear voices of aliens," sense, but the **understanding that a personal, intelligent God** is speaking, and he is speaking to you.

This **realization is a heart-stopping, life-defining moment**. It **changes everything**.

It's the moment when you realize that God has always been there, and specifically, in Jesus, you see that he was coming to earth to rescue you.

That's what we'll get into next week. Bring a FRIEND.

- So, to those of you who are SKEPTICAL, or a "NONE": **COME BACK**
 - Maybe you aren't sure if you believe this. Maybe you are sure that you don't believe this.
 - **Fine. Either way**, GIVE US 3 WEEKS. At least **explore the questions** with us.
 - **That's what this series is all about**—raising some of the hardest questions, the questions that most Christians hope people will never ask.
 - Well, **we're asking those questions** and want you to be a part of this conversation.
- To the CHRISTIAN: **INVITE** someone to be a **part of this conversation** with you.
 - Some of you heard all of this and you were like, '**Man, I really wish I so-and-so had been here to hear this.**' Well, you've GOT 3 WEEKS. So next week, *bring so-and-so*.
 - More **than any other series this year**, *this is one you should not come to alone*. Invite someone.
 - **Get the inviter cards** on the way out, and give them to every single person you know. Let's **pack this place out**.
- Your **campus teams already talked** to you about the specific needs for your campus in terms of **what services to attend** and when to serve. Listen to them.

PRAYER