



Genesis 1 & Romans 1 – Is There a God?

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Week of September 23rd, 2018

SERMON OVERVIEW //

In a seven week series entitled **exploreGod** we will be walking through seven questions that help us better explore God together. This week we approached the question: **Is There a God?**

SERMON TEXT // Genesis 1:1; 26-27, Psalm 14:1, & Romans 1:18-25

Last week Adam addressed the question “**Does life have a purpose?**” He concluded that apart from God, life has no meaning or purpose, which forces us to answer another very important question, “**Is there a God?**”

I want to address 3 groups of people:

1. Those who have a strong belief in God and grounded in their faith.
2. Those who have “a” belief in God, but it may be more of a basic functional or intellectual belief.
3. Those who are skeptics without a belief in God.

If I address each of you individually and ask you this question, “Is there a God?” I would probably get a variety of responses. Some of you would say that you have no doubts that God exists. You would say that you believe with absolute conviction that there is a God. Another group of you would say I believe there is a God, but there is some level of doubt in your belief. You might say, sure there’s a God, but I haven’t really thought too deeply about who he is or what the implications of his existence are. On the other hand, another group of you would say that God does not exist. You may be absolutely convinced that God does not exist with clear reasons that you are confident in defending. Some of you that may believe God does not exist but are not so sure of your convictions or have some reservations about your belief. My hope is that today’s message addresses each you right where you are today in your convictions on this question, “Is there a God?” For you who solidly convinced that there is a God, don’t check out on me, this message is still for you. I hope your faith in this God in whom you believe will be strengthened by today’s message. For you who may believe that there is a God but aren’t really sure who this God is or have some level of skepticism or doubt, I hope this message will help to clarify who this God really is, this God in whom you have a functional or intellectual belief. Finally, for you who are in the camp of full on skeptic or non-believer in this creator God, my hope is that you will become convinced that this God does indeed exist and has created you with purpose.

I want to break things down into 3 areas:

1. Natural Revelation – what God has revealed in nature.
2. Intellectual/Philosophical Revelation – what God has revealed about his relationship to mankind.
3. Moral Revelation – what God has revealed to the conscience of mankind.

Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (English Standard Version)*

You could really think today's question in this way. Did God create the heavens and the earth in the beginning? That's really another way of asking the question, "Is there a God?" If you are the camp of atheism or skepticism, you are not impressed at all that I've taken you to the first verse of the bible as my starting point in trying to convince you that there is indeed a God. You might be saying to yourself, "I don't believe there is a God, so why should I believe that the bible says that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. All I can say is, stay with me, we are going to look at what God has revealed in nature and in the human heart.

Throughout most of history, the majority of humans have believed in some form of deity or god. That's not to say that everyone had the same concept of God or even believed in monotheism, that there is one God. Examples of monotheism would be Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. There have been and are still plenty of folks who embrace a pluralistic concept of God. An example of this would be Hinduism, where many gods are worshiped. History is full of groups who worshiped many gods. The bottom line is that for most of time, mankind has believed in some kind of deity. It wasn't until the enlightenment in the 18th century that there was a large-scale change in thinking and concepts about God. Although the intellectuals of the enlightenment age saw the church – especially the Roman Catholic Church – as the principal force that had enslaved the human mind in the past, most Enlightenment thinkers did not renounce religion altogether. They opted rather for a form of Deism – where there is a god, but he's not really involved in the day to day operations of creation - accepting the existence of God and of a hereafter but rejecting the intricacies of Christian theology. Human aspirations, they believed, should not be centered on the next life, but rather on the means of improving this life. Worldly happiness was placed before religious salvation. Nothing was attacked with more intensity and ferocity than the church, with all its wealth, political power, and suppression of the free exercise of reason.

From that time on, it appeared there was a chink in God's armor. On April 8, 1966, the cover of Time Magazine asked the question "Is God Dead?" in large red letters. More than fifty years after TIME posed the question Is God Dead? on the cover of the magazine, Americans' belief in a supreme deity appears to be declining. The article, which focused on a group of Christian theologians grappling with the idea of a world without an active God, cited a 1965 poll by Lou Harris finding that 97% of Americans still believed in God. By the time Gallup polls asked the same question in 2014, that number had fallen to 86%, with 12% of Americans claiming no belief and 2% with no opinion. The so called "nones", those who claim no religious affiliation, were increasing in number. Truth be told, more than 60% of the 100,000 people in our 3 zip codes are among the "nones", claiming no religious affiliation. What percentage of that population does not believe at all in God, I don't know.

We are living in a time where we have instant access to more information than ever. We are living in an age that people are too intelligent for their own good, seemingly too intelligent to believe in the concept of a creator God. In particular, we live in an area that is full of intellectuals. The college of William & Mary along with a large population of highly educated professionals has created a community full of deep thinkers. Let me qualify this by saying that I'm not opposed to intellectuals and intellectualism. I love education and knowledge. I have a master's degree in mechanical engineering and fancy myself a bit of a science nerd, so put on your thinking caps because I want to make you really think about the idea and implications of not having an eternal preexistent creator God. I want to give you cause to examine whether you should believe, *In the beginning God or In the beginning, no God.*

Let's begin by talking about **natural revelation**:

Let's break down the idea of not having an intelligent creator being. One alternative that is preached by atheists and skeptics is a universe that is not even real. This false reality is great for the movies but doesn't hold water in the land where the sane live.

Another option considered by atheists is a universe that is self-created, eliminating the need for a creator God. This says that there was nothing and suddenly, "it" became something. Theologian RC Sproul says it this way: "If ever there was a time when there was nothing, all there would be now would be nothing. And that's improper to say, because you can't say there would BE nothing, because nothing has no being. The term BE NOTHING would be self-contradictory, wouldn't it?" Creation from absolutely nothing has never been done. The law of non-contradiction, that something cannot be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship wins here.

Some scientists had a brilliant solution to this problem of instantaneous self-creation from nothing. Time. They said, you're right - nothing cannot instantly create. We missed one thing. "Nothing" just needs more time to self-create. So let's get this straight....Nothing + Time = Something.

Simply put - nothing can't create!! Even if you give it an infinite amount of time, nothing cannot create. You can't even think of nothing. Try it. I bet you thought of something, even if it was the concept of nothing.

Why do I need to have a self-existent GOD. Why not simply a self-existent universe that burst into existence. Let's say this "something" is this individual point of singularity that's just sitting perfectly at rest and all of the sudden one Tuesday afternoon it just goes BOOM and decides to explode, bringing the universe into existence. Some would call this the big bang. I have a simple question for those who embrace this. What caused the big bang? Nothing? That would be great if was not for the law of inertia that says "Things in motion tend to stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force and things at rest tend to stay at rest unless acted upon by an outside force." "Nothing" cannot put things into motion, nor can it stop something already in motion. These particular scientists set all their hope on this big bang, but don't give a hoot about the cause of the bang. Scientific theory is innately concerned with causality, so it seems irresponsible science to somehow dismiss the question of who or what caused the big bang. It's a cop out academically to say I'm not going to go there. These questions of creation and existence are THE ultimate scientific questions. We don't have time to examine this exhaustively, but the bottom line is that there's no big bang without a big banger. God has this power of motion that is missing from creation outside of him. You might say that every effect must have a cause, which is right thinking. But what if a self-existent eternal being is the initial cause of all the effects. The bottom line...there is no design without a designer. Order does not appear from disorder. Things are not created by chance. Chance is not even a thing. When we say chance has power, we've essentially turned a mathematical concept that deals with probability into a god. Think with me for a moment about the complex systems in the body. Take the ocular system for example. The complexity and intricacy required to make the eye function is amazing. The ocular system consists of the eye and its central visual system. Light images from the outside pass through the central visual system (cornea, the lens, and fluids) to land upon the retina. The retina then generates the signals passed by the optic nerve to the brain and interpreted as vision.

Look at the other complex systems in the human body and how they function in perfect order. Think about the structure of DNA in the human body. Each human contains a unique genetic code. Look at things like gravity, how the solar system and the planets work in what seems to be flawless order. If physics and biology are just a little off on either side of where they've been designed, there is no possibility for life on this planet. If things are just a little off, the stars and planets come crashing down. Something or someone has designed things to function and stay held together. The atomic glue that holds atoms together that cannot be fully explained. It has been designed and is not a random occurrence. Take a moment to think about all these things and look around at the creation when you leave here today. Even if it were not for the bible, science and natural revelation alone are enough for me to know there is a creator God.

Now that we've unpacked the topic of natural revelation, let's talk about the **intellectual or philosophical revelation** and the implications of believing or not believing in God. Let's see how this God, if he exists might relate to mankind and the implications of believing or not believing that he exists.

If we go back to Genesis chapter 1 to verses 26-27, we read:

Genesis 1:26-27: *"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (esv)*

Even if you've not yet embraced the possibility that there is indeed a creator God, we need to begin to understand the implications of our belief about mankind. Understanding where mankind fits into the picture also helps us to understand why it makes sense to believe that God exists. There is a Latin term *Imago Dei*. In its essence, it communicates this concept that we are made in the image of God. We are image bearers. The essence of Genesis 1:26-27 is that mankind is not a random creation with no purpose. We've been created in the image of God and with a purpose.

Man, like God, is a personal being. God Himself, as the Bible later reveals, is three persons all sharing one divine essence. Humans are created beings, and in that regard, we are similar to and share characteristics with other created beings. But what is most important about human beings is our likeness to God. This likeness is so very special that it sets us apart from all the other creatures God made. Man is not made according to their kinds; he is made according to God's "kind." In other words, man is made as the image and likeness of God. This image is a lot more than an outward façade. It's more of an overall essence.

Another way to think of this is that we are called to reflect the likeness, character, and glory of God. Think of yourself like a mirror providing a reflection of God to the world. You're thinking, wait a second, that's a tall order, to reflect God's very character.

If you are struggling with this concept, I want to you think deeply and philosophically for a moment. Let's go back to last week's question, "Does life have a purpose?" The enlightenment era's message was that man was no longer accountable to God. They raised the banner that we are now free from this accountability.

Here is the implication to this mindset. If mankind is no longer accountable to God, then in the end our lives don't really count for anything. It's a short step from not being accountable to anyone or anything to our lives not counting for anything.

Hopefully all of you are familiar with New England Patriots quarterback, Tom Brady. After Tom Brady won his 3rd super bowl ring, here was his reaction: *Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still feel like there is something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what it is." I've reached my goal, my dream, my life is ...Me, I think, "God, it's got to be more than this."*

Since that time, Brady has added 2 more rings. In addition to those rings, he has a supermodel wife, beautiful kids, and more money than they'll need in their lifetime. Does he feel like he's arrived? No. There's a reason Tom Brady can scratch his head with those 5 super bowl rings, yet he's not satisfied and still longing for more. Success, no matter how great, is not your ultimate purpose in this life. A wise person once said, once you get to the top, you discover there is nothing there. We all want our lives to count for something, but if you are honest intellectually, you know that if we rose from slime and will ultimately end up as dust, our lives cannot truly count for anything meaningful.

God has also revealed himself through **moral revelation**. There are moral implications to believing or not believing that God exists. Turn with me to Romans chapter 1 verse 18:

Romans 1:18-25: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."* (esv)

The interesting thing is that much of the world, including our own country to a large degree, has rules and laws that attempt to define right from wrong. Many of these laws are based upon biblical principles, but let's ignore that fact for just a moment. I bet most of you in this room have a pretty good idea of when you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you are doing something wrong. Now you may suppress that knowledge and do the "wrong" thing at times and anyone who says they haven't done that has deceived even himself. You might argue that you "behave" because of the way you've been taught or the society in which you have been raised. I will argue that there is something innate in each of us that knows when we are crossing the line between good and evil. You may be thinking, yeah but there are people out there who commit reprehensible crimes against humanity that have no conscience or knowledge of right and wrong. The news is full of stories of brutal murders, serial killers, those who commit horrible crimes against children. Recently there was a story of a young college student who was jogging near the corn fields not far from her midwestern home and was murdered by a farm worker. I believe that even the worst of criminals has something inside of him that allows him to

know he is crossing a line. He has simply ignored his conscience to allow himself to commit the horrendous crimes against other humans and society. Over time, when one lives as if there is no God, the conscience becomes seared and the line between right and wrong becomes blurred. When we live as if there is no God, we suppress the truth that has been written on our hearts in one way or another.

The biggest moral implication that arises when we don't believe in God is that there really is no rationale for morality, rules, or any kind of order. If there is no God who sets a standard, what standard is there really to follow. Think about this for a moment. If there is no moral absolute, there is really no reason to follow a moral code of conduct. The murderer is probably living truer to his belief that there is no God than the person who lives a morally upright life apart from a belief in God. If our lives really don't count for anything and we are not accountable to anyone, then there is really no reason other than a manufactured guilty conscience or not getting thrown in jail that we would live morally upright lives. If you are honest with yourself, it's difficult to look around at what God has created and not believe there is someone or something greater out there that has set a moral standard.

This passage says, *"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in things that have been made. So they are without excuse."*

I cannot prove beyond the shadow of a doubt through science, logic, or anything else that there is a God, but God will and has revealed himself to the conscience. God has revealed himself to mankind in so many ways. The creation screams of a creator. Although our passage in Romans says, *"Claiming to be wise, they became fools..."*, I will argue that when we suppress this knowledge of God, it is a moral, not an intellectual suppression.

Psalm 14:1 says it this way: *"The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* (esv)

I want to go back to last week's passage from Ecclesiastes. The author, King Solomon, after spending much of his life suppressing the knowledge of God, discovers that apart from God as the main purpose of life, life is ultimately meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 1:2-4: *"Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!" What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes.* (New Living Translation)

Solomon had gotten near the end of the road, and after pursuing women, big houses, and everything a man could imagine - and believe me, he had the wealth to have just about anything on this earth - he said, if we just go into the ground, there really is no meaning to any of this stuff. The stuff will either fade away and disappear or someone else will end up owning it. He understood that he could not take it with him to the grave. He understood that the God he formerly pursued in his youth was really the meaning and purpose behind it all. Don't hear me say that wealth is bad. If you have wealth, that's not a bad thing and can in fact be a great thing. There is nothing wrong with wealth and things, as long as they do not become ultimate things for us.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 1 says this: What is the chief end (or purpose) of man?

Answer: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Pastor John Piper puts an interesting twist on this answer that I believe speaks better to our purpose. He says the chief purpose of man is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever. If you are searching for purpose in your life and keep on coming up empty, it is because you are not pursuing God as the main goal of your life. Pursuing God as your main purpose is not a wearisome thing. He wants you to have joy in this pursuit, not anxiety and fear.

Earlier we talked about how we were created in the image of God - that we are his image bearers. Does that mean that we are perfect image bearers? Are we like a perfect mirror into God with no flaws? No, you and I are like broken image bearers or distorted mirrors, stained by the sin and imperfections of this world. Relax. God knew that this would be the case. Unlike many religions, in Christianity God does not ask you to strive for perfection. That said, God does demand perfection, which may seem like a contradiction, but it's not. God is holy and righteous and cannot look upon our sin and imperfection. Our passage in Romans says, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."* On our own, we are rebels that will face the wrath of God. Instead of climbing a mountain and striving to reach God and do the impossible task of becoming perfect, the God of Christianity reaches his hand out to us and comes into our world in the form of Jesus. Knowing that we could not live a perfect life and be perfect image bearers, God sent his son Jesus as the perfect image bearer. Jesus lived the perfect life that you and I could not live. In a few weeks, we are going to answer the question, **"Is Jesus really God?"** Colossians chapter 1 gives us some insight about who this Jesus is.

Colossians 1:15-20: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."* (esv)

Jesus is the perfect image bearer or perfect mirror reflecting the character of God. He is God in human form. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead, so that we could have eternal life. He made peace with God on our behalf. If you want to know what God is like, simply look at Jesus. If you want to know how to reflect God's glory, look at how Jesus did it. Study the life of Jesus if you want to know what God's character is like.

Although Jesus paid the price for the sins of those who follow him, so that we will one day live in perfection with him. There will no more tears, no more pain, and no more suffering. That, however, doesn't exempt us from suffering in this lifetime in this mortal body. Next week, we are going to answer a question that even people of faith ask, **"Why does God allow pain and suffering?"**



Discussion Questions - Is There A God?

COMMUNITYGROUPS

Week of September 23rd, 2018

Question 1

If you were with us Sunday, listened to the sermon online, or reviewed the sermon notes - what was something that resonated with you?

Question 2

A Time Magazine article from 1966 asking the question "Is God Dead?" cited in the sermon referenced that 97% of Americans believed in God in 1965. According to polls in 2014, that number dropped to 86%. **To what do you attribute the large decline in the belief in God, more specifically an all-knowing and all-powerful God, over the last few decades?**

Question 3

What makes it easy to believe in God? What makes it hard to believe in God?

Question 4

What role – if any – did God play in your family when you were growing up? How does your upbringing impact your beliefs now?

Question 5

Many times science is mistakenly pitted against faith. Science can actually help us to have an informed, intelligent faith. **In what ways can we use science to support our faith?**

Question 6

When you think about natural revelation, intellectual or philosophical revelation, and moral revelation, how is it that each of these things informs or strengthens your faith? How important are these things as a starting point in apologetics (defense of the faith) to open the door to talk to atheists or skeptics about special revelation (the bible)?

Question 7

What do you think could convince you to change your current stance on God's existence – be that belief or unbelief?

Question 8

How do we fight another 11% decline in the belief of God over the next 20 years? As individuals... as a community group... as a church?