

Psalm 19:1-6 (Opening)

*1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

*2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

*3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*

*4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

*5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.*

*6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

How do you know that God exists?

I mean, really. How can you prove to me that God exists?

Back on February 4th, there was a much publicized debate between Ken Ham, the president of “Answers in Genesis” and CEO of the Creation Museum in Kentucky, and Bill Nye the Science Guy, a science teacher turned actor and comedian who used to be a mechanical engineer at Boeing building 747s. The debate was entitled “Is creation a viable model of origins in the contemporary scientific era”.

If you have a computer with Internet access, the entire debate is available on YouTube. I spent some time Saturday morning reviewing some of the debate. Over 2 million people have watched the video on YouTube, which doesn't count the people who watched the debate as it was broadcast live on the Internet back on the 4th.

What I find most interesting about this debate is that it happened at all. Why are they debating this topic?

The debate was very well produced and organized. It was fair, had very strict rules, and was moderated by Tom Foreman from CNN. Mr. Foreman was reasonably unobtrusive, and tried to inject a little humor into the debate at the beginning.

But I guess this is my point about all this. If you look out your window, walk in the woods, go fishing in the ocean, go on an African safari, or whatever you do, how can you believe that all these amazing things around us just happened by chance? How can you dismiss the intelligence in the design and operation of the universe? All this just **happened?**

I've said several times, I don't have enough faith to be an atheist. I can't look at the amazing things around us and say there is no guidance, no intelligence behind it; that it just **happened.**

For thousands of years, mankind has attributed some kind of supernatural power to what goes on around us. A god or gods must have caused all of this, because it wasn't done by mankind. But today, mankind has decided that we know better than that. We're smarter than anyone who lived before us. All this just **happened** with no guidance or intelligence at all. And we know this because we've studied what we see, and because of that we can assume that there are only the laws of nature controlling how things happen.

Wait. What? The laws of nature? Where did those laws come from? Did they just **happen**, too? Because from what I remember, they're pretty specific; maybe a little too specific to have happened by chance.

We're looking at the book of Romans. We're still in chapter 1, and I think we'll be there for at least another week. I think I've told most of you, one congregation we attended several years ago had a Sunday morning Bible class on Romans that was supposed to go 13 weeks. After the first 13 weeks, we'd finished the first chapter! So, I'll pat myself on the back I guess; we're not going to take 13 weeks for chapter 1.

Where were we? Paul just finished saying that God's righteousness is revealed through the gospel. Now we're going to see that another aspect of God is revealed by something a little different than the gospel.

Romans 1:18-23

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ 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.²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

What is the wrath of God? Well, the Greek word used here is *orgē* (or-**gay**). It can be translated as wrath, anger, vengeance, and indignation. When the word is used regarding a human emotion, it's usually a negative thing. But what about God's wrath? Is that a negative thing?

God's wrath can feel like a negative thing when it's directed at you, I'm sure. But God can't do anything evil, and God can't sin. God is the embodiment of holiness and righteousness, which is the opposite of sin.

This is how I think about the wrath of God. God is pure, holy, just, and righteous. God hates sin, and can't even look at sin. So, God's reaction to coming in contact with sin would, to us, seem violent, but that's just what the natural reaction of sin coming in contact with perfect holiness would be. The best example I can come up with is matter and anti-matter. Unless science has changed in the past 30 years or so, they can't come in contact with each other, because they will annihilate each other. Since God is more powerful than we are, we feel what we call the wrath of God when we sin, because God is so pure and holy that our sin causes that reaction.

Paul gives two attributes of mankind that causes God's wrath to be displayed: ungodliness and unrighteousness. The word ungodliness is from the Greek word *asebeia* (as-**eb**-i-ah), which means living without regard to a religious belief or practice. Today I guess we'd call that atheistic, which is also from the Greek, meaning without god. Ungodliness goes to the persons spiritual state.

The second attribute is unrighteousness. The Greek word here is *adikia* (ad-ee-**kee**-ah) which is wickedness, evil, and wrongdoing. This word points more to mankind's actions. Paul will go on to point out that being *asebeia* leads to being *adikia*. Paul says that this unrighteousness is how ungodly men suppress the truth. What's interesting is that in the Greek, there's a definite article before the word suppress. Maybe a better translation would be that this unrighteousness causes the suppression of the truth. That suppression of the truth could be a self-preservation skill that these ungodly people have developed so that they don't confuse themselves, and can continue to believe the same lies that they keep sharing with everyone around them.

Paul says that both the wrath of God and the righteousness of God are revealed to us, in two different ways. The word Paul uses here is the Greek word *apokalupto*, which is where we get the word apocalypse from. The problem with our definition of the word apocalypse is that we've decided it means something cataclysmic, when it only really means a revealing or unveiling or disclosure. So we can see what the wrath of God is because of human unrighteousness and ungodliness.

God has revealed his nature to us; all of us. Every human who is alive now and who has ever been alive has had the opportunity to see what God is like. He may not have been able to see the details of what God requires, but he should have been able to understand the power, order, and awesomeness of God, and know that He is worthy of worship.

Let's go back to Psalm 19 again and take a look at how God reveals Himself.

The first six verses of Psalm 19 talk about how God reveals Himself to everyone on the earth. David says that everything about what we see every day should tell us that there is a God. It's too ordered, too organized, and too well maintained to be some random happening. The non-Jew at the time should have understood that something created everything around us, set it all into motion, and keeps things going on

their paths. That's what theologians call a "general revelation". God shows His nature to everyone.

Continuing in Psalm 19, we see that David then explains a more definite or specific revelation that God makes of himself through the Law.

Psalm 19:7-11

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Here, David says that through Moses and the Law, God has revealed Himself more perfectly to the Jews, so they can truly know his righteousness. We'll get back to this in a few weeks, but for now, let's just say that the general revelation of God doesn't lead to a complete understanding, but should lead to at least an understanding that there is order, love, and justice in the universe, and the source of that is worthy of worship.

We have the more specific revelation, the one we talked about last week; the revelation of His righteousness through the gospel.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:44, 45

Matthew 5:44, 45

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

The basic understanding that God exists and takes care of us all, is available to all.

Paul says that because of the overwhelming evidence available, everyone should know there's a God and should honor Him and thank Him, but not everyone does. Paul uses a legal term to describe their condition; it says they are "without excuse". This is a compound Greek word that literally means without a defense. In a legal sense, the person has no legal recourse to defend himself. This word is only used twice in the entire Bible; here in Romans 1:20, and again in Romans 2:1.

The sense is that God is just in revealing His wrath because of this ungodliness, even though neither the Law nor the gospel has been revealed to them.

The last three verses of our key scripture today, verses 21-23, tell the sad story of how mankind has always decided that they are the most important, most powerful, and most worthy of anything, created or creator.

Keep in mind we're not talking about the children of Israel here, we're talking about what they would call "the Nations"; everyone else. Specifically, Paul is writing to the church in Rome. Roman culture, because of the expansion of the Roman Empire, was extremely diverse,

and so were the religious practices throughout the Empire. Rome was polytheistic, believing in more than one god. In fact, they had a god for just about everything. Lots of the names of Roman gods are familiar to us still today; Jupiter, the king of the gods, Neptune, the god of the sea, Pluto, the god of death, Mars, the god of war, Venus, the goddess of love, Mercury, the messenger of the gods, Saturn, the god of time; oh, and Vulcan, the blacksmith god, not a planet, but still quite well known in our culture.

Roman gods were “borrowed” from the Greeks, for the most part, and then given a new name. Most of the Roman gods were human-looking, but there were exceptions. Cerberus for instance was the three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to the Underworld.

Even though Egypt came under the Roman Empire, they still kept many of their old gods. Most Egyptian gods were mostly human, but had animal attributes. Ra, the Egyptian sun god had the head of a falcon. Anubis, the god of embalming had the head of a jackal. Ammit, the destroyer, was the god that ate the souls of the unworthy dead; he had the head of a crocodile, the upper body of a lion, and the lower body of a hippo.

Humans have strange and fertile imaginations. Paul implies that they couldn't deal with the idea that there was one God who was Lord over everything, so they decided to create gods that resembled humans, birds, livestock, and “creeping things” or reptiles.

Just like when Paul was writing this letter to the Romans, we today are dealing with the same problems of people exchanging the glory of the immortal God for idols. Our idols are a little different, but not significantly.

Some of our idols are small rectangular pieces of paper, or even smaller rectangular pieces of plastic; money. We focus on greed and thank ourselves for our good paying jobs so we can afford to go out and get

all those nice things we really “need”, but actually only are greedy for. Or we spend our time staring at a large rectangular picture put on a prominent altar in our primary living area in our houses; our TVs. We let our desires confuse us and tell us that what we want is what we need. Or we lie to ourselves as a culture and tell ourselves that sex is the most important thing in life and it becomes our god.

Paul finishes this part of his letter to the Romans with a very long laundry list; you could call it a dirty laundry list. All the bad things that we evil humans do when we start focusing on what we have decided are gods, and not what God has decided is important. We’ll look at them more in detail next week, but suffice it to say for now that turning away from God and worshiping idols is the death spiral for a culture. Rome was at the edge of that death spiral when Paul wrote this letter.

Looking at the comments I’ve seen regarding the Bill Nye / Ken Ham Creation vs. Evolution debate back at the beginning of this month, I have a hard time determining who people thought was the winner. And it’s odd; most Christians thought that Bill Nye, the evolutionist, did a better job. Most evolutionists seemed to think that Ken Ham, the creationist, won the debate.

I think the most important thing about the debate was that it happened. There was open debate, and for the most part it was a cordial, open discussion of the issues. It didn’t devolve into a shouting match, or name-calling, like what usually passes for a debate these days. What was clear from the debate and the discussion that it generated, was that there are two primary world-views today, and they do not agree on one of the most important ideas; that God exists, is in control. Like Paul says, everyone should know that because of the evidence that’s been in front of us since the beginning of time. We have no excuse.

Acts 17:22-31 (Closing)

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for

“ ‘In him we live and move and have our being’;

as even some of your own poets have said,

“ ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Questions

1. When you're talking to your non-Christian friends, how can you reinforce the idea that God exists, based on what we see every day? Has it been an effective way to start a discussion about God?
2. Why do you think human nature is to turn away from the obvious fact that God exists and loves us and make up things to worship?
3. Is it possible, with all the scientific advances and discoveries of the past century, to believe in a literal Biblical creation? Is it OK to compromise on that belief and still believe everything else in the Bible?