

# "Existence of God"

Romans 1:18-25

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## Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to study a request that has come in from one of the very young elementary school students. It is a question that comes up often, it is a question that comes from people of all ages, and it is a question that comes in many forms. But this morning, I would simply like for us to study this question in its most basic form. **»PPT»** And the question is, "**How do we know there is a God?**" We are so thankful for the children of this congregation and their courage to ask the most basic and most important questions. It is interesting that every survey ever taken on this subject says that a vast majority of Americans believe that there is a God, and yet we wonder how many of them have really thought about it. How many in our nation have really investigated? We are thankful, then, that one of the children here has asked such an important question.

For us to try to answer this question, I would like to ask that we turn to a passage in **Romans 1**. In our pew Bibles, it starts on **page 1759**—**»PPT»**—**Romans 1:18-25**. We know that the book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome in roughly 56 or 57 AD. We know that the Romans believed in many gods (going back to the Greeks). They believed in Jupiter as the king of gods, and there were dozens of others. And yet at the same time, we know that the more intelligent Romans could see that it was all a big joke, and so those who were more enlightened rejected the idea of God altogether. And so as Paul opened his book to the church in Rome, he had to deal with this issue right away: Does God really exist? And how interesting it is that we are still facing the same question even today, even from among the little children, "**How do we know there is a God?**"

Certainly there are many ways that we could answer this question. We could look at a huge list of complicated arguments, we could zip around from Scripture to Scripture, but for the purpose of our study this morning, I would like for us to basically stay in one passage as we look at how the apostle Paul (a highly educated man) answered this question as he wrote both to the most humble of slaves and to the most powerful government officials in the city of Rome. If you will, please look with me at what Paul wrote in **Romans 1:18-25**...

***<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since***

**the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.** <sup>21</sup> **For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.** <sup>22</sup> **Professing to be wise, they became fools,** <sup>23</sup> **and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.** <sup>24</sup> **Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.** <sup>25</sup> **For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.**

What a powerful passage! And as we look back at **verses 19-20**, we find that there is no excuse for not believing in God, because (as Paul says), the evidence is abundant, the evidence has been "**clearly seen.**" In other words, this is not a subject that people can just agree to disagree over, but Paul is saying that the evidence is everywhere—the invisible attributes of God can be seen by all people.

This morning, then, I would like for us to look at this passage as we consider, first of all, that many people will try to suppress the evidence for the existence of God—many people do not want us to believe in God. But secondly, we need to remind ourselves that the evidence truly is abundant. And then finally, I would like for us to remind ourselves (based on what Paul says here) that the consequences for not believing in God are horrendous. In other words, our response to the evidence is extremely important.

**I. But first of all, we need to notice Paul's warning. We are not starting out on level ground here, because in our society—in the workplace, in our public colleges and universities, in our high schools, in our middle schools, and even in our elementary schools—MANY PEOPLE WILL TRY TO SUPPRESS THE TRUTH OF GOD'S EXISTENCE.** **»PPT»**

Up in **verse 18**, Paul talks about the wrath of God being, "**...revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.**" Those who are ungodly are those who have no regard for God—those who think they do not need to worship God. Those who are unrighteous are those who have no regard for doing right, those who have no regard for God's justice. And Paul says that these people will actively work to suppress the evidence of God's existence. God reveals truth, and these people try to cover it up. God is saying, "**Here I am!**" and these people are saying, "**No, He isn't!**" These people are trying to cover up the truth about God, because if they believe in God, then it means that they will need to change the way they are living. They are living in ungodliness and unrighteousness, and so they do everything possible to suppress the truth about the existence of God. They suppress the truth so that they can continue

living as if God did not exist. The problem, then, is not a lack of evidence, but the problem is that there are people out there who are actively working to suppress the evidence.

Most of you know that I enjoy watching COPS every Saturday night. But one of my favorite parts is watching how stupid some of the criminals are. An officer finds a crack pipe in some guy's pocket, and the man insists to the officer that the crack pipe is not his. He swears up and down that someone else came along and slipped that crack pipe into his pocket without him knowing it. Not too long ago, an officer put a woman under arrest, and the woman said, **"No, I am not under arrest,"** and the officer said, **"Yes, you are under arrest,"** and she said, **"No, I am not under arrest,"** and it went back and forth for some time. She was refusing to accept the clear evidence. The police can lay all the evidence right out there on the hood of the squad car—the drugs, the money, the little bags of meth, the scales used to weigh it—and some people will ignore the evidence. And obviously they have a good reason for doing so. They know that if they admit it, that it's all over. We can say the same thing about those who refuse to admit the evidence for believing in God. They know that if they admit God then they will need to change the way they are living.

You know, it is interesting that in a society that prides itself on tolerance and diversity, that people will be so scared of even remotely considering the possibility that God had something to do with how we got here. As Paul seems to say, it is not enough for these people to ignore the truth, it is not enough for these people to merely tolerate the truth, but as he says, they have decided to hinder the truth, they have decided to suppress the truth. They want to beat it down.

Some of you might remember the controversy that came up several years ago down in Cobb County, Georgia. The local school board approved the use of a science textbook teaching the theory of evolution. However, the board also had a sticker placed on each book stating this, **"Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered."** To me, that seems like a pretty fair statement. After all, I went to a high school in the suburbs of Chicago where the biology teacher said, **"Only idiots believe in creation."** So the statement down in Georgia was rather refreshing—they encouraged the students to study carefully, to critically consider, and to have an open mind. But you know what? The school board was taken to court. According to critics, the sticker violated the separation of church and state—even though the sticker said nothing about church, nothing about the Bible, nothing about Christianity, nothing about creation, nothing about God. But in spite of any evidence, the judge ruled that the sticker was illegal and had to be removed from every textbook. How interesting! A sticker calling for an open mind, careful study, and critical thinking apparently supports belief in God. I think that judge admitted a little more than he meant to. It is amazing to me that those who do not believe in God appear to be so afraid of someone they do not believe in!

This simply confirms, as Paul said nearly 2,000 years ago, that many people are trying to suppress the truth of God's existence, and they will do everything in their

power to make sure we do not believe. This is the first thing we need to understand as we consider the question that led to this morning's lesson. Many people in the world (including many in our public school system) are trying to suppress the evidence. Many people do not want us to believe in God.

**II. As we look back to the words of Paul, we notice, however, that THE EVIDENCE FOR GOD IS ABUNDANT. »PPT»**

In other words, there are all kinds of ways for us to know that God exists! In **verse 20**, we find that we can know God, **"...through what has been made."** **"Through what has been made"** represents a single Greek word, the word POIEMA. It is the word from which we get our English word "poem." The universe and everything in it, therefore, are described as God's **"poem."** When we look at a poem, we know that somebody wrote it. When we see the arrangement and the rhyme and the rhythm, we know that those letters on a page were arranged by someone. Those letters did not end up rhyming by accident, but we understand that a poem was written by a poet. And in the same way, when we look at the creation, when we look at the world around us, we know that this creation has a Creator! The world is God's work of art. The universe is a poem about God, and the poem has a poet!

In **Romans 1:20**, Paul says that God's, **"...eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."** Less than a hundred years before Paul wrote this, another Roman citizen wrote something very similar. Most of us are at least a little familiar with the Roman orator by the name of Cicero. Cicero said, **"The celestial order and the beauty of the universe compel me to admit that there is some excellent and eternal Being, who deserves the respect and homage of men."** Very interesting! Here is a pagan, and even Cicero understood something about the nature of God just by looking around. Cicero could look at the universe, and Cicero could say to himself, **"There is someone out there who deserves to be worshiped!"**

In our Scripture reading this morning, brother Stuart read a powerful passage from the book of Hebrews, **"For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4)**. The passage represents an idea that all of us can understand. Even the little children here this morning know that when they see a house, that house had to be built by someone. But in our society where the knowledge of God is suppressed, even the greatest evolutionary scientists accidentally let it slip from time to time. Dr. Michael Behe is a scientist who has done much writing on the idea that there is design in the universe, and that such intricate design logically calls for a designer. In one of Dr. Behe's books, he quotes Dr. Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist. As a staunch evolutionist, Dr. Dawkins has said, **"Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose."** So one of the leading evolutionists of our time very clearly admits that the world around us has the appearance of having been designed for a purpose! In his book, Dr. Behe also quotes Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA. Dr. Crick says, **"Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved."** Again, very

interesting! According to one of the leading scientists of our time, we see evidence all around us that God designed the earth and everything in it, but (in his words) we must constantly remind ourselves that there is no God!

When we look carefully, though, the admissions sometimes accidentally slip. Back in March of this year, our family had the privilege of visiting the Lincoln Park Zoo down in Chicago, and as we were looking at the lions, the sign right outside the building caught my eye. »PPT» I seriously doubt that the people who designed the displays at the Lincoln Park Zoo would admit that God created the heavens and the earth, but it seems that they let it slip just a little bit, because if you look at the title on the whole sign, it says, **“A Deadly Design.”** Think about that for just a moment—let it sink in! And if you look even more carefully at the first paragraph »PPT», they go on to say, **“Everything about a lion’s skull is designed for hunting, killing and eating large animals such as zebras and wildebeests.”** They have a skull right there on the sign, and they admit that it was designed! We would simply ask: Who designed it? Who created the lion, and who designed the lion to be uniquely equipped for killing and eating large animals? Who did that?

If we look in our science textbooks at school, they will say that everything came into existence as the result of a huge explosion—often referred to as the Big Bang. And yet, have you ever seen the results of an explosion? When a terrorist sets off a bomb, do people rejoice in the new life forms created? Does an explosion make things better or make things worse? We know the answer to that question. A **“big bang”** does not **“design”** the skull of a lion.

This past summer, we had the privilege of visiting the National Zoo in Washington, DC, and while we were there, one of their displays also caught my attention. »PPT» I think it might have been a sea otter, I’m not exactly sure what the critter was, but do you notice the huge heading on top of this display? »PPT» Very interesting, **“Built to Survive.”** This particular animal was **“built to survive.”** Again, let that sink in a little bit! Who built it? Even evolutionists apparently believe that the sea otter was **“built to survive.”** We know that God is the builder. As we read from the book of Hebrews, **“For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God” (Hebrews 3:4).**

What about the little critter known as the archerfish? »PPT» This little fish obviously lives underwater, but it has the ability to accurately shoot a stream of water to dislodge an insect sitting on a branch several feet outside the water. Scientists tell us that the archer fish has the ability to accurately judge the size of its prey and to adjust the size of the stream and the force of the blast. It would be a little like a hunter thinking about what he wants to hunt and then deciding the weapon and the caliber. Just a few years ago, German scientists confirmed that the archerfish even has the ability to shoot down targets in flight! I don’t know if we can appreciate what it takes to accurately shoot down a target above the water from under water. Have you ever opened your eyes underwater? Maybe when some of our guys go deer hunting in a few weeks, you guys can take your rifles, hold your breath, jump in a lake, sneak up on a deer, and shoot the deer from underwater! It’s brilliant! But we look at the archerfish, and it works. They are able to shoot down

insects with a blast of water. What an amazing design! Do we think that evolved over millions of years as the result of a giant explosion?

We can go even smaller, and we can look at the mussels that cling to the bottom of our boats. Certainly there is no design and nothing we can learn from a mussel, is there? »PPT» Perhaps you noticed the article in the *Wisconsin State Journal* back on August 24, 2006. There is a local biotech company currently studying what it is that allows those tiny mussels to stick to stuff, and they are doing everything possible to use that knowledge to develop an adhesive to close wounds during surgery. With most adhesives, the surface has to be perfectly clean and dry. When we get a bottle of Elmer's or a tube of Crazy Glue, the first step is always, **"Start with a surface that is clean and dry,"** but here is this little mussel that can stick to the bottom of a dirty boat under water. What an amazing design! As a society, we give money to companies developing this stuff, but we often forget that the original design came from God.

In a related story, »PPT» scientists are also looking into one of the strongest adhesives ever found. They are not sure how it works, but it comes from a tiny bacterium known as *Caulobacter crescentus*. The substance allows the bacteria to stick to stuff—that's why we have to wash our hands with warm, soapy water—not to kill the bacteria, but to loosen them and wash them down the drain. Well, the adhesive they are developing based on this little critter is so strong, in fact, that it sticks to absolutely everything, including the tools they have used to make it—so it is almost too sticky! In their efforts to reproduce it, they can't get the glue out of the container! And again, the design of that adhesive was not invented by man, it was discovered. God is the designer. We look at the animal kingdom, therefore, from lions, to sea otters, to archerfish, to mussels, and even to tiny little bacteria, and we are reminded of the words of Job in **Job 12:7-9**, where Job says, **"But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you. Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you; and let the fish of the sea declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?"** The hand of the Lord has done this! We can look to the animal kingdom, and we clearly see the evidence of God's design—we see God's footprints all around us! But let's keep looking...

What about Mt. Rushmore? »PPT» Would we agree that this is a sculpture, designed and built by the hand of man, or would we say that this design was the result of millions of years of erosion? Do you think that anyone would fall for that? Would anyone say that the wind blew and the rain came down and these faces just popped out of the rock? »PPT» But isn't that what evolution says about this face? That this face is the natural result of a giant explosion and millions and millions of years of random mutations? Just as someone designed and built Mt. Rushmore, so also God designed and built the human face.

We look at powerful computers, »PPT» and we are amazed at what can be done. We would say that computers have been designed. We would say that someone had to think it up. We would say that there had to be hard work, and research, and development. Sometimes we forget that it took a human mind to design the first

computer. But what about the human brain? »PPT» Wouldn't we say that the human brain is far more complex than the world's most powerful computers? Have you thought about how powerful the brain has to be simply to recognize a friend? But not only can we recognize a friend face-to-face, we can also recognize a friend from the side. Not only that, but we can recognize a friend from behind! About a week ago, I was out somewhere and came up behind someone and called out that person's name—I had recognized the back of his head! I had not seen him for a year, but I recognized the back of his head! And we can probably all say something very similar. Imagine the computer power it would take to recognize the back of someone's head!

I would say that if the computer had an inventor, then the brain also has an inventor, and that inventor is God. In fact, I would have to say that that's a "no-brainer." We could go through all of the details of the human eye, and the ear, and the various organs, and we would have to say that the human body was the high point of God's creative power. We would agree with the words of King David in **Psalm 139:14**, "*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.*"

We could also look at our solar system. »PPT» We can look at our place in the universe, and we can be amazed at the design that we see all around us. Some of you know that you can go to NASA's website, and you can see a chart of when the International Space Station will be visible from any spot on the face of the earth. And if the skies are clear, you can go outside tomorrow morning at 6:01 AM, you can look 11 degrees above the northwest, and you will see a small speck of light—almost like a shooting star—that will be the space station. And over the next four minutes (from 6:01 to 6:05 a.m.), that little speck of light will travel across the sky and will disappear at 16 degrees above east-northeast. Well obviously, that trajectory involved a lot of design. The fact that we can predict it is absolutely amazing! But what is even more amazing is that we can also predict the next total solar eclipse. »PPT» The next eclipse in our area will take place at 9:50 a.m. on September 14, 2099. You know how we can predict that? There is order in the universe! There is design in our solar system! The earth is moving in its orbit at more than 66,000 MPH, in the course of a year, the earth will travel a distance of 595 million miles, and yet we know exactly where it will be with relation to the sun and moon in almost a hundred years—even to the point where we can predict the next eclipse to the second! By going to NASA's website, you can even predict solar eclipses anywhere on the earth through the year 3,000 and beyond. There is design in our solar system! Certainly we would agree with the words of King David in **Psalm 19:1-2**, "*The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.*" By day and by night, those who are searching for God can know there is a God. In fact, as Paul says, those who say there is no God are "without excuse." Atheism is the most unnatural religion in the world. To be an atheist, someone would have to deny that what their eyes are telling them every moment is true. From the smallest bacteria to the largest stars, the universe is telling us that God is. »PPT» We learn, then, that the evidence for God is more than abundant.

### III. As we look back to Romans 1, though, we also find that THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNBELIEF ARE TRAGIC. »PPT»

Towards the end of the passage we started with this morning, and even into the following paragraph, the apostle Paul describes a slow descent into darkness for those who stubbornly refuse to believe in the existence of God. In verse 21, people refused to honor God, they refused to give thanks. Like a dog eating food from his dish, there is no prayer before eating dinner. That's how it starts. Paul also says in verse 21 that ***"they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."*** I have the picture of someone driving as the sun goes down, but as it gets darker and darker they refuse to turn on the headlights, and they soon become very dangerous. That's what it's like when people refuse to believe in God—their foolish hearts are darkened. Going on from there, Paul says that people will always worship something, and if it isn't God, then we tend to worship images in the form of man and animals. And eventually it gets to the point where people are just totally absorbed in all forms of sin; because, as Paul says in verse 25, ***"they [have] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and [have] worshiped and serve the creature rather than the Creator."*** Any culture that rejects God very quickly goes from bad to worse.

And it is interesting that in rejecting God, people claim to be so smart the whole time. But, as King David said in Psalms 14:1, ***"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good."***

If there is no God, and if we are simply the result of a huge explosion followed by millions of years of random mutations, then Charles Darwin was right: It all comes down to the survival of the fittest. If Darwin was right, then all that really matters is that we do whatever it takes to survive, that we step all over others on our way to the top of the food chain. Did you know the full title of Charles Darwin's book? »PPT» The full title is, ***"The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life."*** Darwin was a racist. We can look at the Nazis and what they did to millions of people. That is the natural result of believing in the theory of evolution. As Paul says, ***"...they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."*** It has been said that we must work hard at convincing ourselves that God is not there, and only the most intelligent are able to do it. Very interesting: The default position is for humans to believe in God—it takes a lot of effort not to.

#### Conclusion:

I am reminded of a story from the life of Helen Keller. »PPT» Ms. Keller was blind and deaf and went off to the school for the blind with her teacher, Miss Sullivan, at the age of nine. She had never learned about God, because her parents could not communicate with her. While she was attending the school, a minister came to visit and explained through Miss Sullivan, in sign language in the palm of her hand, about God. As she heard about God for the very first time, she answered in her own way



and signed back, **“Oh, I always knew he was there. I’ve known Him for a long time. I just did not know His name.”**

Even a blind and deaf 9-year old girl believed in God, she just did not know His name. Today, we know God’s name. We know what God has done for us. And even beyond that, we know what God has told us to do. In response to the good news, the Bible teaches that we are to repent and be baptized. If you have any questions about God’s plan, we hope you will talk to us after the service. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)