

## Why Don't People Believe the Bible is True?

Romans 1:18-23

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Many people do not trust the Bible as reliable. A large majority of the world's population would reject some or all of the Bible's truth claims. What about you? Do you believe the Bible is reliable? Some of you maybe don't trust it completely. Why? Maybe some Christian you knew shut down questions you had about the Bible. So you turned to other sources and found a readiness to listen. Some don't trust the Bible because they cannot reconcile claims from science, history, archaeology or some other field that seem to contradict what the Bible claims. Some will point to inaccuracies, inconsistencies or contradictions that they see in the Bible. They conclude that it can't be trusted nor could it be from God. Maybe some don't trust the Bible because they don't like it or find its claims out of touch with our world now. Today we are going to discover a much deeper reason why people don't believe in the truth of the Bible.

I think this reason is the root of a lot of the other reasons. It might be a reason why you or someone you know doubt the Bible's reliability. It was from another writing by the apostle Paul. We have learned a lot about him lately. We've look at his writing to the young pastor Timothy and also his difficult second letter to the Corinthians. Today, we're looking at another letter to Christians in Rome probably in the 50's or 60's of the first century. This letter contains the most complete explanation and unfolding of the Gospel. But it also reveals a lot of truth about humans and our relationship with God. In one of his opening paragraphs, Paul makes a claim that address the question, why don't people believe the Bible is true?

So what we're going to do is look at this claim and Paul's explanation to prove it. We will see how this root issue can lead to disbelieving the Bible. Then we'll see how we can turn to God for help to deal with this issue in our lives. I pray that God will use this all to draw us closer to Him and His Word.

### **Romans 1:18-23 (ESV) (Page 797)**

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Paul has just declared in verses 16-17, that he is “not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” But starting in verse 18, he begins to explain why we need a Gospel. This reasoning goes all the way to chapter 3:20. But in verse 18, Paul gives us the answer to our question.

**Why don't people believe the Bible is true? Because ungodly and unrighteous people suppress the truth about God.**

An ungodly lives in a way that does not honour God. He or she does not acknowledge God as the one true God. So they give their supreme worship to someone or something else. An unrighteous person commits moral sins - anything we think, say, or do that is contrary to God's moral law. Paul writes that people by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The word translated “suppress” means to restrain or hinder or stifle. It's like gagging someone someone who knows truth. It's as if this unrighteous person took off the lid off a manhole cover on the street. They throw a truth-knowing person down the manhole. Then they put the lid on the manhole and stand on it so the person with truth cannot get up to the street. They suppress the truth.

But what truth do they suppress? It's likely the truth about God. In verse 25, a little beyond our reading, Paul uses that exact phrase. “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie.” The truth suppressed is not just a set of facts. Truth in the New Testament is something to be done and obeyed. You don't just affirm truth, you obey it. You live it. You live in the light of it. So suppressing truth includes denying truth and living contrary to the truth.

Now think for a moment how suppressing the truth about God might impact our reading of the Bible. If we suppress the truth that God is the Creator, we might be much more open to other explanations for the origin or first cause of the universe. If we suppress the truth about God's existence, then we will be much more open to a world governed only by human beings – those in power or those who have the majority opinion behind them. If we suppress the truth that God is good and defines what is good, then we feel freedom to redefine goodness and badness according to our preferences. If we suppress the truth that God ordained marriage to be between a man and a woman, then we gain more confidence to redefine marriage to what the majority or those in power think is appropriate. Suppress the truth about God can lead to disbelieving much or all of the Bible.

**But is it true that people actually suppress the truth about God?** People honestly argue that they don't see evidence for God. Therefore, there is no truth to be suppressed about him. Paul would disagree. He goes on to defend his claim in verses 19-23.

Is it true that people actually suppress the truth about God? Paul would say **yes because God's eternal power and divine nature can be clearly seen in the "natural" world.**" Verse 19 – "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 the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." God and His creative ability can be seen in the natural world. If we take a good, long, hard, open-minded look at the natural world or creation, Paul says we would conclude that only someone with eternal power and divine nature could make this. Only someone with such power could initiate or cause a process to occur resulting in the mountains. Only someone with power beyond our comprehension could create our vast universe.

Consider what John Piper writes "The Hubble Space Telescope sends back infrared images of faint galaxies perhaps 12 billion light years away. That is 12 billion times 6 trillion miles. Even within our Milky Way, there are stars so great as to defy description like Eta Carinae, 2 stars which are 5 million times brighter than our sun. . . . Isaiah 40:26 states "Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power not one is missing." <sup>1</sup> So God created all the stars and knows them by name. He created the vastness of this universe. That is one powerful God. This is the same God who knows your name and cares intimately about you and your future and eternity.

Yet, we can be so self-absorbed that we never even look up to the sky. We don't even see the stars. Or if we do someone immediately credits something other than God with their origin. We often hear that if a new star or new galaxy found – may be other life forms live there. Here's a headline from this past week. This is from Space.com. "Super fast stars in the milky way may be visitors from beyond." It reads "The cosmic merry go round that is our rotating Milky Way galaxy may not be the reason stars are whizzing by and seemingly flying off at high speeds." The Gaia spacecraft is on a five year mission studying 1.7 billion stars in our galaxy. Scientists discovered 20 stars traveling at a speed where they could escape the Milky Way. So one possibility raised is that these stars are actually travelers from another galaxy that

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Peculiar Glory*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 2016, 200)

are speeding through ours on some sort of journey. Hmm. What if God created these 1.7 billion stars? The Milky Way which contains our solar system in one of its own? If we accept the claim that God is Creator of all of this, we begin to see only an eternal power and divine nature could create this. But suppress the truth about God and you have to find another explanation like aliens.

So Paul says in verse 19 that if you look at the things that have been made & conclude whoever made them must have great Godlike power you would make a valid conclusion. He argues this is plainly and clearly perceived. But by their unrighteousness, people suppress the truth about God.

Then he provides another answer to the question “is it true that people suppress the truth about God? **Yes, because in some way they knew God, yet they did not give Him proper honor or glory.** In verse 21, Paul writes, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.” But wait a minute Paul. How does anyone know God? You’re saying that people who don’t believe in God somehow know Him? How can you know someone you don’t even believe in or talk to?

Well it certainly can’t mean they know God as their Redeemer or Savior. Nor does it mean that they know God in a close way like a sheep trust their shepherd. It could be that Paul argues that since God created everyone with His image, there is some sort of knowledge of God within us.

It’s like we have a template or empty shape in us that only God fits into. Or there’s a hole in us that only God can fill. But instead of filling it with God people try to fill it with something or someone else. Notice that happens in verse 22. “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.” That’s idolatry. That’s putting someone or something else in the shape that only God could fill in our lives. One commentator puts it like this. “If the knowledge of God at the very center of every person is to have any positive effect, it must be embraced. If not, a darkness settles that only the light of the gospel can penetrate.”<sup>2</sup>

“So even if we say we do not see or know God, Paul disagrees and says we do. We all do. And what we may call “not knowing,” Paul calls suppressing the known.”

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1996, 107.

But why do people do this? Why have we done this? I think John Piper's insight into this is very sobering. He writes "The effect of sin is to make us resist glorifying and thanking God. Deep down in our souls, there is a rebellion against the majesty of God and his all-sufficiency. We do not like to be utterly dependent on his mercy. Deep down we also perceive that our resistance to God is so damning that we cannot live with the consciousness of it. The result is that we suppress the truth and become futile in our thinking and dark in our hearts. We either deny the existence of God or distort his majesty to make him tolerable."<sup>3</sup>

Did you hear that? "Deep down we perceive that our resistance to God is so damning that we cannot live with the consciousness of it." It's like that unrighteous person who pushed the truth teller down the manhole. Once we get the manhole cover sealed, we go on with life pretending that that person doesn't exist. We try to keep them out of our thoughts. We think out of sight and maybe they will remain out of mind. But deep down we know they still exist. We may wonder will the truth someday come to the surface and will have to face it? We are often confronted with truth when someone dies. What do we do now? But we might say we would never do what these naïve ancient people did in V 23.

Now we might look at verse 23 and conclude how foolish those ancient people were. They exchanged giving glory to God for giving glory to idols – images made out of wood and stone. We would never be that naïve. But we live in an image saturated world. We "worship" different kinds of idols; Celebrities; Sports teams; Elite sport athletes; Singers; Movie stars; Leaders; Politicians; Artists. The ESV Study Bible notes that "Modern idols don't look like ancient ones. Images served today are often mental rather than metal. But people still devote their lives to and trust in many things other than God."<sup>4</sup>

So where have we been today? We've asked the question "why don't people believe the Bible is true?" We found one major reason in Romans 1:18. Ungodly and unrighteous people suppress the truth about God. We've seen Paul back up this claim that people suppress truth about God. It's true because God's eternal power and nature can be seen in the natural world but people don't honour God for doing that. It's also true because everyone knows of God at their very center yet, we do not give him proper honor and glory. Instead, we exchange worshipping the immortal God for worshipping images or something other than God.

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<sup>3</sup> Piper, *Peculiar Glory*, 201.

<sup>4</sup> ESV Study Bible, Good News Publishers, Crossway Bibles, 2008, Comment on Romans 1:23, 2159.

So what can we do with these discoveries? **1 – If you don't believe in God or are far from Him, consider how suppressing the truth might explain this.** Maybe you were taught to suppress the truth about God by others in your life. Maybe any questions you had about God were shut down by people around you. Or maybe you've tried to figure out life on your own and have never allowed the possibility of God to even be part of your thinking. But you're here today and something has broken through to your heart. It's like the manhole cover has cracked open and instead of trying to stomp it closed, you're wondering what's down there.

But now you see that you can no longer live like that. You desire to live God's way. **2 – You must trust Christ and His work on the cross to move from being a truth-suppressor to a truth-expresser.**

A truth *suppressor* stifles or smothers truth about God. A truth *expresser* has trusted Christ and His cross for rescue from God's wrath. Then they begin to accept truth about God. They live according to that truth. If that's you, God can do this transforming work in your life today when you by faith put your trust in Christ.

**3 – Grow in learning and knowing the truth about God.** We do this by walking with the Spirit and reading God's Word. Talking to other Christians – taking a good long look at creation. But we also need regular idol alert check-ups.

**4 - Invite the Holy Spirit to identify who/what you chiefly worship.** Has anything/anyone replaced God as your supreme treasure? Yourself? Vacations? A full stomach? A show on TV? How others respond to your posts? Success in your career? Success of your children? The songs of some artist? The accomplishments of some elite athlete or team? Money? Power? Being with your boyfriend or girlfriend or some other person? Nothing wrong with a lot of the things by themselves, but if they are our supreme treasure – that's idolatry. Should the Holy Spirit reveal something else other than God as your first love, confess that & put God back in His rightful place in your life.

**5 – Continue to seek God in His Word to see His glory (which includes truth) and be transformed by the Holy Spirit.** Piper writes “We were made for the glory of God . The deepest longing of the human soul is to know and enjoy the glory of God. This is what Paul meant when he said that every human being knows God. There is in every human heart a true witness to the reality of the glory of God in the world and in the word. . . The template in our heart waits for the perfect fit of its divine counterpart – the glory of God. Seeing God's glory heals our disordered lives.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Piper, *Peculiar Glory*, 206-207.

Friends, we live in a culture of confusion today that has collectively suppressed the truth about God. But we don't have to live in confusion. There is still meaning, truth and clarity to be found in God. There is such a thing as truth that we can base our lives upon. God has revealed Himself through creation, through Jesus and through His Word. So let us go to Him as our anchor, trust Him with our souls, come to God who opened the way through the sacrifice of His own Son.