

Why Do We Believe in God? #1

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It's very good to see everyone out this evening on a rainy evening as we come together for our Tuesday night Bible study here together at Truth Community Church, and as I've announced a time or two, we're going to consider the question: why do we believe in God? And as I told you, I realize this is a repeat from a couple of years ago but it's very urgent on my mind that we would keep these truths central in our mind and rehearsed often in our mind. If there was anything that I would want for Truth Community Church and the people who are from Truth Community Church, I would want these truths to be central and easily recited in your minds and in your families and so that's why we want to go back to them and realizing that many of our people that are with us now weren't with us when we first did this a couple of years ago.

The question might well be asked: why would you do a series titled why do we believe in God, why would you teach that to people who already believe in God? I realize and I'm not trying to persuade any skeptics in the audience here this evening and we need to understand and maybe ask that as a preliminary question: why would we even do this series? Well, let's not assume too much about where we're at spiritually. Christians often need assurance. They need to be strengthened in their weakness. When they are surrounded by darkness, they cry out, "Why is it that we believe in God?" And the things that have been taught over the years sometimes slip into the background in the midst of pressing trials. Young people of whom we have many, wonder if they believe only because their parents do and they want something other than an inherited faith; they want to know for themselves, at least they should, and be able to answer for themselves why do we believe in God? And as they move out into the marketplace and into the world and come into clash with competing hostile worldviews, we need to be able to answer those questions with strength and with confidence.

Why do we believe in God? There are at least five answers to that question. We're only going to look at a couple here this evening, but the answers, frankly, are so simple that a child can understand them; at the same time, the answers are so profound that adults and mature Christians cannot plumb their depths. There is a simplicity to God's revelation of himself that makes it easy for us to say why do we believe in God, and yet there is a profundity that we could spend the rest of our lives studying and never exhaust the depths of it. So this is the justification and I'm just very very mindful of, you know, we have dozens of families with young children in our church and we need to rehearse these

things even as, you know, the cults are not at all bashful about rehearsing and indoctrinating their people in their false doctrines. It seems to me that it should be central in our mind to establish these things for the generation coming up and rehearse them for ourselves so that our witness for Christ would be strong as we move forward as a church.

Now, we acknowledge and I want to kind of introduce it this way, we acknowledge the fact that there are competing ideas in the world. We realize that there are wealthy prominent authors, we have close relatives even, that would mock everything that we're going to say tonight; that they would mock the very existence of our belief in God and accuse us of having an imaginary friend or an invisible friend in life. We're not intimidated by that at all. We don't care about that and at the same time, I want to explain exactly the way that we are approaching it is that our idea here this evening and on this coming Sunday is not to convince people who are unwilling skeptics, rather our desire here this evening, and it's so good to see so many of you out to see the beginning of a coming together around these central truths, it's important for us as Christians and important for us as a church, to understand our own position. We need to know our own position. That's where our strength is going to come from and the fact that a skeptic would object and not be interested in what the Bible has to say about these things is not our interest tonight at all, however, we do believe as you proclaim these things, the Spirit of God uses them and convinces and persuades people who are otherwise unwilling to believe. So we're not intimidated by hostile arguments at all, we understand where that comes from, but we also want to know our own position and be strong in that.

Now, having said that, what do we say, how should we think about the fact that there are opposing opinions and you could lay what we're going to say out and people would reject it and not believe? How should we think about that? Well, I think there's a very clear passage in Scripture that helps us think rightly about this. Even during the days of Jesus, men had conflicting opinions about who he was. If you would turn to Matthew 16, I just want to by way of introduction, run you through a brief passage of Scripture so that you would understand that there is nothing that is unsettling for us about the fact that many people disagree with our confident belief in a living God. We are not upset about that. It doesn't make us question whether we are right or not. The truth of the matter is, we are right in what we believe. We are right when we believe in the God of the Bible. Those who reject him and deny him and ignore him, they are absolutely wrong. We're not intimidated by the postmodern spirit of our day, and this passage in Matthew 16 will help us see and understand that.

Look at verse 13 with me, Matthew 16, as we consider the ideas and introductory matter. What about the opposing opinions? Well, in verse 13, Scripture says that, "when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'" Notice this, while Jesus was incarnate on earth, there were a multiplicity of opinions about who he was and they were in conflict with one another; they were irreconcilable with one another. In fact, all of those opinions that the disciples recited to him were incorrect, but the question is, did that confusion among men consign the disciples to a mental hell of uncertainty of belief so that their

questions about Jesus' identity could never be resolved? And the answer is no. No, not at all. Hardly. The confusion of men simply gave birth to their eternal conviction.

Look at verse 15, "Jesus said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" Jesus says, "You need to make up your own mind. You are accountable for your own way of thinking. You are accountable to know this for yourself. You are accountable to make your own decisions and come to conclusions and not excuse yourself from responsibility simply because men disagree with one another." We're not drawing from the opinions of men in order to decide what we believe and the fact that men who are dead in sin and opposed to God have conflicting opinions and are opposed to what we teach and what we believe, has absolutely no bearing on how we respond to the truth of Scripture, and Jesus says to his disciples that, "You need to make up your own mind."

You might ask, "Well, is that possible when there are so many competing views?" Look at what Simon Peter says in verse 16. Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered him, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Look at that. Peter, a fisherman in the first century, properly identified the eternal Son of God for who he really was and there was no support from men about him to encourage him in that direction. Today, we're presented with the question: why do we believe in God? Who do you believe in? What do you say about the God of the Bible? Well, what I want every one of you to understand and to be strong in is that the fact that there are voices in the world that are shouting at you, "Don't believe," and drawing you away, that that is not a hindrance to you to coming to a robust, firm, confident, assured belief in the God of the Bible. It's simply not a factor. Peter got it right when the majority got it wrong.

How did he do that? Look at verse 17, Matthew 16:17. Peter got it right when the majority got it wrong. How is that possible? Look at verse 17, "Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" How could Peter know the truth about Christ in a cauldron of unbelief? God had revealed truth to him. God had made it known to him. This is a pivot point for us in understanding why we believe in the God of the Bible. Why do we believe in God? Understand this, beloved: we believe in God because he has revealed himself to us. God has made himself known. He has spoken and he has made himself known and therefore you and I believe in God not of our own autonomy, not because we have a cherished self-belief that we want to engage in, we believe in God in response to what he has said. We believe in God in response to his self-disclosure. This is very important for you to understand and I'll repeat this a few times throughout the series. What we are about to say about the reasons that we believe in God are true, and what you must understand is that they are all independent of what you or I or any other man think about them. They are true because God has revealed himself. They are true if you had never been born. Everything that we're about to see here is independent of you and me. It is outside of our mind. It is not a subjective belief that we have, we believe in response to objective manifestations of the way that God has imprinted himself in his creation and in the hearts of men and in other places that we will see in the days to come.

So we believe in response to what God has made known, we believe because God has spoken, and these things are true if you and I had never existed. They were true before the 20th century began, they'll be true after you and I are gone and into heaven ourselves. So we must understand that this is not rooted in something that I must conjure up in myself, God has spoken in ways and made himself known. And overall, we're going to look at a total of five ways that God has manifested himself. We're only going to look at the first two tonight.

Why do we believe in God? Here's our first reason. They all start with the letter "C." We believe in God because he has spoken in creation. He has spoken in creation. God has made himself known in the external universe, in the external heavens in which we live.

Turn to Psalm 19, a familiar passage and one that we'll be coming to again in our exposition of the Psalms in a short few weeks. Psalm 19:1-4, and I absolutely love this material from God's word. Psalm 19:1-4, "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. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard." In other words, it's a silent testimony. Verse 4, "Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world." What this is saying is that when you look up into the sky, whether you look up in the daytime or in the nighttime, you are seeing an ongoing manifestation of the glory of God. The heavens are telling of the glory of God and are speaking to his existence in a silent worldwide capacity. The incomprehensible magnitude and the order of the universe point to the God who established it all by his wisdom and power. We see the sun by day, we see the moon by night. We see a kaleidoscope of stars in the heavens. We know, speaking collectively as the human race, we are able to calculate their movements with absolute down-to-the-moment precision. That magnitude and that precision speak to the reality of a living God, and – watch this – day after day, God is revealing himself in this way. Men may take it for granted, men may not look up and see it and say, "Oh, God is making himself known here," but their indifference and their stupidity does not diminish the fact that God is making himself known. There is not a moment in time where God has not been declaring his existence through the created order. There has not been a moment in time where anyone anywhere on the earth has not been subjected to the testimony that there is a powerful God who is the Creator who set these things into place.

Turn over in this regard to Romans 1. God speaks from the heavens. Men may take it for granted but that's not God's fault. In fact, Scripture says quite to the contrary, men are culpable for not responding to that. Look at chapter 1, verse 18 of the book of Romans where the word of God says that, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." Verse 20, "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." Verse 21, "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. Professing to be wise, they became

fools, 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." This passage says that creation unmistakably speaks forth the reality of a powerful God with invisible attributes and men are accountable to seek after him. Creation shows forth God's power and God's deity.

Now, you might ask a question: is that in and of itself, is that sufficient reason to believe in God? Just the fact that there are planets and stars spinning about in creation and we see these things and the sun is there in the day, is that enough reason to believe in God? Many of my friends don't think so. You know, there is just an ever burgeoning class of self-professed atheists, they don't think so. So what makes us think, what makes us so dogmatic that creation testifies and is a reason for us to believe in God? Well, think about it this way in light of what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1: denying God in light of his creation is grounds for eternal judgment. People will be cast into hell for rejecting this revelation from God and there is no excuse. There will not be any sense at the final judgment that this was unfair, that God hid himself and therefore they were justified in their unbelief. No. No, it's not like that at all. The testimony of creation is like driving down a dark country road and suddenly you come up on a big billboard that is surrounded in neon lights flashing on the side of this isolated road on a dark night. You couldn't miss it because it is there. It is reverberating and you can't possibly miss it because it is so evident and so obvious. No one could be excused for saying, "I didn't see that billboard when I was going down." Well, in a much greater way, in a much more significant way, the created order of the universe speaks to the God who set it in motion, and every time that we look up into the sky, every time that our daylight is made present, every moment that you step outside and look up and see the sun, see the moon, see the stars, God is saying, "Here I am," making himself known. So we see that billions of people everywhere throughout all of time are accountable for this knowledge of God.

Now, we realize that scientists scoff at that. We understand that men of degrees mock us for taking what they consider to be such a simplistic view of the universe. Let's think about it from God's perspective. God mocks their fantasy that a big bang produced creation. Bombs do not produce precision and order. Go to any war zone and see. So while on the one hand you have the testimony of Scripture saying that the testimony of creation makes all men accountable to believe in God, you have that revelation from God, on the other hand you have men of finite mind and of passing existence saying, "No, there is no such God and let me explain to you how the universe began." Well, come back in the midst of that conflict to what Jesus said to Peter about his own self-existence. It comes down to this: what do you say? What do you say in response to what Scripture says? What do you say in response to the testimony of creation about the existence of God? There is no arguing with God over this and as we saw in Romans 1, the only way that people can even deny this is that they have to suppress in their conscience that which they already know to be true. This is all inexcusable and, as I said, we'll talk about that more in days to come.

Turn over in this regard also to the book of Acts 14, perhaps a slightly lesser known passage. Acts 14:16-17, the Apostle Paul says, "In the generations gone by God permitted

all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Paul says that the cycles of nature even in times prior to the coming of Christ were giving a consistent testimony to the existence of God. The predictable cycles show by any measure of minimal common sense that somebody is running this universe. The cycles of nature speak to the existence of God and so Scripture says that all men are without excuse; that there is no such thing as a true atheist because God has made this so evident to them and they'll be judged for denying it.

Isaac Watts' hymn that we often sing on Sundays, "I Sing the Almighty Power of God," says it this way,

"I sing the goodness of the Lord, that filled the earth with food,
He formed the creatures with his word, and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, wherever I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky."

It's there. The testimony of God is there. He has spoken in creation. Whether we look at the ground, whether we look at the sky, whether we look at the cycles of the seasons or the cycles of the planets, the imprint of God is all over it and that is the first reason that we believe in God. Understand, beloved, reemphasizing the point, understand that this is not something subjective in ourselves that we are counting upon, we are believing in God as a result of something external to us, something outside of us, something that is objective and independent of our own existence. So this is not, "I believe because I believe. I believe because God has first spoken and made himself known." The order of that is very significant.

Now, for tonight, we're just going to look at a second aspect of it because God has spoken in a second area also and he has spoken, 2. in the realm of conscience. In the realm of conscience. We believe in God because a principle of conscience operates in the human race. Humanity has a broad sense of right and wrong and if you turn back to the book of Romans 2, I want to show this aspect to you from Scripture. Romans 2:14, I'll give you a moment to turn there. Romans 2:14. The principle of conscience, Romans 2:14. The Apostle Paul says, "when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." Paul here is speaking to the reality of conscience. Conscience is a built-in device that God has planted in humanity that gives us a general sense of right and wrong. It condemns us when we do wrong, it affirms us when we do right. Conscience is not the voice of God, it is not an infallible device, but it is a human faculty which God has implanted in the human race to help us know right and wrong in a very basic sense.

Now, if you think about it, this fundamental sense of right and wrong transcends cultures and it transcends time. Generally speaking, you can find similarity in the laws which

govern life in society across different cultures. Generally speaking, you can find imprints of a moral code that we would honor today found in past millennia in some of the other law codes that were written. There is a general imprint of right and wrong. This can be expressed through the common revulsion that men have at a massacre of children like happened at the Connecticut school some years ago, or that happened in Russia when some madmen bombed a gymnasium with hundreds of children in it. There is a common revulsion to that. Men don't have to think about whether that's right or wrong, it's just imprinted, "That is evil and wicked and wrong." You can see it in another way, something maybe little bit closer to home, when we understand that there is a common reaction against hypocrisy in spiritual leaders. The world has no problem judging that, judging a man who claims to speak in the name of God being exposed as a total fraud in his life: as a man addicted to wealth; as a man like Ted Haggard who proved himself to be engaged in homosexual behavior when he was a prominent spiritual leader. We don't need anyone to teach us that the various frauds in the charismatic movement are something that is wrong. People understand that. The world gets that. And we even see that sense of conscience imprinted upon our own hearts in the feelings of guilt that we have over our own private wrongs. Listen, we should look at that and think, we should ask a very basic question: where does that universal principle come from? How is it that there is this general sense of right and wrong written upon the human heart? Scripture explains it. Scripture says that God has written his moral law on human hearts. He has spoken there. Conscience testifies to his existence.

Now, someone might ask, "Is that a sufficient reason for men to believe in God?" Well, they had better. They had better because Paul says that God will use an individual's conscience to judge men who had never heard his law. It is clear and unmistakable. Look back at Romans 2 with me there. Paul says that "when Gentiles do instinctively the things of the Law, they show the work of the Law written in their hearts," and what's going to happen in response to that, God will "judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." God will use the principle of conscience to judge men who had never heard his law, and this is part of the reason why it's not a problem that God will judge those who have never heard the Gospel. He won't judge them according to revelation that they never received, he will judge them according to the principle of conscience that was operating in their own heart. That will be the law by which he judges them, and every man will be proven guilty even by that standard. So we ask the question: is conscience sufficient reason to believe in God? According to God it is because it's going to be sufficient for him to judge men at the final day. So through repeated sin and indifference, individuals can dull that sense of conscience, but at each step they must suppress the inner testimony that they have to the reality of God. One writer put it this way, he said, quote, "We all have some awareness that the sense of obligation to do good and to spurn evil reflects the will of an ultimate Lord to whom we are finally responsible."

Look at it this way, beloved, God has spoken in a macro sense in creation in a way that never escapes us. He has spoken in a micro sense in the realm of the inner man of a person's heart. He has spoken in big ways and in small ways. His testimony is relentless. Try as they may, men will never silence the voice of God in these areas. They can't shut down creation. They can't ultimately shut down conscience and so there is this

permanent, ongoing, ever-expanding testimony of God speaking to the reality of his existence and God expects, God requires, God will hold men accountable for how they respond to that. And the fact that men are fallen, the fact that men mock this, that they ignore it and reject it, is no indication that the testimony is not absolutely true and that we are completely accountable for how we respond to it.

Listen, and I want to make this clear and be very dogmatic even about exactly what it is that we're saying here. We're not making a probability case for the existence of God. We're not saying that it's more likely than not and therefore men should probably believe. We're not appealing to men saying, "Please believe and please consider this." No, we're saying that this is absolutely true and absolutely right and there is absolutely no excuse for disagreeing with the testimony of God in these realms. There is no arguing against this. To reject what God has said in the way that he has made himself known in creation, the way he has made himself known in conscience, is simply culpable, willful unbelief that is utterly sinful and subject to judgment at any time. That's what we're saying, and what I want you to see is that we are not, you know, most of you know that there are a lot of philosophical arguments with long names that are hard to remember that make a probability case for God, the existence of God, and those are okay as far as they go, but I think that they are very inadequate compared to what Scripture points us to, and that these things are accessible even to the youngest child who is able to entertain language. "Look up at the sky, Johnny, and see the imprint of God there. Johnny, when you feel guilty over disobeying your parents, understand that the testimony of God is imprinted upon your own heart."

Now, creation and conscience are limited in their function. They cannot lead us to spiritual salvation through repentance and faith in Christ. They constitute what is known as general revelation, the testimony of God that is available to all men everywhere. It is enough to convict, it is not enough to save, but it is enough to require men and to make them accountable saying, "In light of what you see, you should be searching for the ultimate answer about this God who is making himself known in what is all around you and what is all inside you. Inside and outside, it's there. His testimony is there. God has spoken. You must believe." And to walk away from that testimony is to walk through the gates of eternal judgment and say, "I will willfully go into judgment rather than submit my mind and to search after what God has made known." So these things are, for us as Christians, these things are very encouraging and strengthening, aren't they? This is a wonderful thing to see and for us it's self-evident. It's obvious because of the work of the Spirit of God on our hearts. But what we want to see and what we have to be clear on is that there is no excuse for unbelief. It is unjustifiable. It is cosmic treason that is subject to eternal retribution simply by what's around and what is inside.

Now, if men would search, they would find more reasons to believe. If they would come to a Christian and say, "I see in creation the reality of a God, could you please lead me to a fuller truer knowledge of him?" We would say, "Yes, of course, we would be delighted to do that." And what we will do and what we point men to in response to that further searching is what we're going to examine on Sunday and follow through on this. But beloved, what I want you to see, what I want you to walk out on in this introductory way

is that our belief in the God of the Bible is grounded in objective evidence that is outside us. We are not making this up. We do not believe because we have been tricked into following some old wives' tale. We don't believe because we're too weak to deal with life on our own. It's not because we're afraid, it's not because we are silly. No, no, at the final day, it will be shown that our belief was justified because our belief was in response to a God who has spoken truly in these realms of creation and conscience and made himself known and there will only be a sense of sorrow over those who rejected it without excuse.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Yes, our God, we see where you have made yourself known in these opening ways. We see that you have made yourself known in your creation. We recognize your imprint in the heavens above us and in the conscience within us that we see operating in humanity across the board in one way or another. Father, we see your imprint and we receive it. We accept it. We bow before it. We say, "Yes, you are a righteous God, powerful as displayed in your creation, righteous as revealed within the realm of our own conscience. Father, a human principle which we did not instill in ourselves but which is inescapably testifying to us a powerful righteous God reigns over us." Father, we gladly separate ourselves from those who mock this, who deny it, who claim that there is no true God. We separate ourselves from those who worship false gods. We separate ourselves, Father, from the spirit of our age that says this is just what's true for you and it's not true for me, and that truth is relative and let's not be too dogmatic about these things. Father, corporately and individually, we reject the spirit of our age. We affirm what you have affirmed in your word. We affirm it dogmatically. We call all men to believe and submit to it, not because of superior intellect of our own, but because this is your unalterable truth that you have made known and it is not ours to diminish it from a truthful certainty to a mere probability argument. Father, we will never in this church betray your truth by reducing it to something that is optional to the simple mind of man.

So give us grace, Father, strengthen us in our belief, and as we look forward to Sunday where we will see even more special ways that you have made yourself known, Father, we pray that you would cultivate this knowledge, these truths, these convictions in us corporately as a body of believers, that we would be strong in these things against the spirit of our age, and that even the parents that are here would be able to teach these things to their children and that the dozens of families that are coming up and growing up under the sound of this pulpit, Father, would find that they are inculcating these things in their children and that their children are being prepared to go out into the world with a confident believe that will be unshaken by the things that will assail them in days to come. Father, that's how strong and powerful your truth is; that's how strong and powerful your omnipotent Spirit is, is that it can enable us to believe and to rise above the falsity of our age. So we ask you to help us receive these things, to understand them more deeply, and while our fellow humans debate silly things, Father, when the Spirit comes around to us, as it were, and says, "But what do you believe?" we would be ready with strong biblical answers, unashamed and in your presence bowing before you and saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe."

Father, for those who are here who may not know the Lord Jesus Christ in a forgiving redeeming sense, we ask you that you would lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ; that you would bring them to a knowledge of the cross where the Savior was crucified in the place of sinners, taking punishment so that they could be forgiven if they would repent and turn to him and receive him for eternal life. Father, bless us now as we sing and as we take refuge in the mighty fortress which is you, our living God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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