

**“Without Excuse”**  
**[Reading: Romans 1:18-32 & 2:14-16]**

**Intro.** Recently, I have been listening to a teaching series by R.C. Sproul titled **“The Psychology of Atheists.”** R.C. Sproul was a very scholarly pastor, and this series *provides* a great deal of insight into the thinking of atheists [The non-believing world]. **According to Jesus himself, the ‘world’ is full of far ‘more’ atheists/ agnostics/ and people who are involved in cults and false religions than believers in the one true God ...**

*... i.e., the world is ‘mostly’ full of people who are spiritually blind to the truth about God, and “lost;” ... and (according to the bible), unless they repent and come to Christ, will die and go to hell for all eternity! ...*

**In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said:** *“Enter through the narrow gate. For **wide** is the gate and **broad** is the road that leads to destruction, and **many** enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But **small** is the gate and **narrow** the road that leads to life, and **only a few** find it.”* – cf. Jn. 14:6.

One would have to be totally blind and ignorant of today’s world and the culture we are living in [living in a cave somewhere] ... to avoid the realization that it is becoming more and more strongly anti-God and anti-Christ [pro-atheist & pro agnostic]. And I am not referring to a ‘significant minority’ of the population; ... Biblical Christianity itself has become very unpopular in our time...

A **Wikipedia** report says: “Christianity is declining in the United States while non-Christian faiths are growing.”

Is Christianity on the decline? ^

The **decline of Christianity** in the Western world is an ongoing trend. Developed countries with modern, secular educational facilities in the post-World War II era have shifted towards post-**Christian**, secular, globalized, multicultural and multifaith societies.

[https://en.wikipedia.org > wiki > Decline\\_of\\_Christianity\\_...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decline_of_Christianity)

And it seems that many in our culture are finding it more *‘fashionable’* to disassociate themselves from the Christian church [a growing trend!].

In light of all this, it would seem wise for genuine, bible-believing, born again, evangelical Christians to familiarize themselves with **“The Psychology of Atheists,”** ...

i.e., What is it that ‘makes’ people Atheists or agnostics, and why do they cling to their unbelief? ... **many of our friends, neighbors and relatives [our loved ones] are in this company**, and our heart’s desire, as Christians, ought to be to win them over to faith in the one true God and belief in the glorious Gospel of Christ, **before it’s too late!**

In his series of lectures on “The Psychology of Atheism,” R.C. Sproul seeks to trace **the historical development of humanistic, atheistic thought** [which, by the way, is closely related to the thinking of modern liberal Christianity]. ... **I would like to read to you some comments by R.C. Sproul along this line of the historical development of atheistic thought ...**

**R.C. Sproul ...** “It has been said of **the 19<sup>th</sup> Century** that it was ‘the age of unbridled optimism’. ... The optimism that was pervasive in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was generated by an enormous sense of the vast improvements of the human living condition being brought to bear by science and by education.” ...

**REMINDER:** The 19<sup>th</sup> Century followed the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Period of **Enlightenment** – the great ‘Age of Reason’ – is defined as **the period** of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterized European society during the ‘long’ 18th century: from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.

**Sproul continues:** “... It was almost universally assumed by thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that man was finally coming of age; coming out of the childhood and adolescence of religious superstition, now, through ‘science’ as the new handmaiden for culture, we would be able to create an environment where war would be no more, where all diseases would be conquered, and where people would begin to live together in harmony and in health and prosperity. This carried over into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, even to WWI, which seemed to retard this optimism, but even that war was said to be ‘*the war to end all wars.*’ “And ... **we** find this unbridled optimism in scientific endeavors that would bring heaven to earth. ...

[But, in general, says Sproul ...] “It could be said that the reaction to that in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the reaction of disillusionment, which we’re living out, even today!”

At the beginning of his sermon last week, **Pastor Ross** reviewed the pressures and challenges Christians face today in our modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century world: **the lingering pressure of Darwinism ...**

[**Theory of the natural spontaneous appearance of matter and its upward development into the universe and the earth as we now know it – despite the second law of thermodynamics, which states that the natural tendency of any isolated system is to degenerate into a more disordered state,** ... **atheistic science, Post-Modernism** [which suggests there is no such thing as objective truth – and as a result has spawned an unbridled brand of ‘tolerance’ for everyone and every belief – except for those who disagree; ... and this has served as a source of rampant lawlessness [defunding the police, ... rioting, etc.]

All of this, ... because **God** is left out of the picture [hated, despised and rejected – [cf. **Rom 8:7**].

**And so, we ask the question: “What is The Psychology of Atheists,” i.e. What is it that makes people Atheists, agnostics, or idolators; and why do they cling to their unbelief?”**

Sproul comments that “Thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century did not concern themselves with the question of the existence and the significance of God ...” [most of them were atheists who were convinced that **Darwin’s Theory of Evolution** and the theories of atheistic philosophers had successfully disproved the existence of God]. “Rather, they concerned themselves with the question: “If there is no God, why are there so many theists?” ... i.e. Why do so many persist in believing in God if the case for God has collapsed?”

**German philosopher, Ludwick Fruerbacher [the precursor of Karl Marx – both were atheistic philosophers]** theorized that man is capable of projecting fantasies of a better world and a Supreme Being when faced with realities in his own world that are harsh and undesirable. **Sigmund Freud** [The Father of Modern Psychoanalysis] sought to explain the origin of religion and the idea of God in terms of psychological motives. Both **Freurbacher, Marx and Freud said** man invents religion because of his fear of the forces of nature.

**Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre** [both of whom were also atheistic thinkers] **argued that since man has a free will and is autonomous, a sovereign God could not exist** (R.C. Sproul uses the “**Something’s Gotta Give**” argument.) ... by Johnny Mercer, 1954 ...

When an irresistible force such as you  
Meets an old immovable object like me  
You can bet just as sure as you live  
Something's got to give  
Something's got to give  
Something's got to give

[**It is significant, and important to note that** these [and other] scholars, thinkers and philosophers did not ‘disprove’ the existence of God, ... they merely argued against it and “presumed,” – as a starting point for their reasoning, that He does not exist.]

It is interesting that the Apostle Paul presents a psychology of atheism in Romans chapter one. ...

Specifically, in **Romans 1:18**, ... this is a psychology that ‘suppresses’ and represses manifest truth. **Calvin** said the Creation is like a theatre of the grand glory of God that we walk through blindfolded. He’s talking about a blindfold that we put on ourselves; ... a natural disposition of the human heart, ... **not** a literal blindfold, ... but an act of the will. ... i.e., **we refuse to acknowledge the glory of God in the creation.**

**This reveals a natural bias of the human heart** [a bias of the highest degree]. Paul is saying that, by nature, we refuse to have God in our thinking!

**Psalm 10:4 - In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.**

**As we consider this “Psychology of Atheists,”** ... we need to consider two things:

- 1) the Bible’s declaration of the fact of mankind’s response to the revelation God has given of himself in the creation is nothing short of **outright ‘denial’ of plain and evident truth!** –
- 2) After this, we need to consider **the psychological process** by which man “**suppresses**” the truth about God and “**exchanges**” it for something that is infinitely inferior, that which Paul says is “**a lie.**”

### **First: An outright ‘denial’ of plain and evident truth in the creation!**

Paul’s argument in Romans 1 is that every human being knows about the reality of God because God has revealed the fact of his existence [Greek = Fanero = to “manifest” and “make known”] in two distinct ways:

#### **1. In the creation itself [Rom. 1:19-20] ...**

“<sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

R.C. Sproul points out that this is “**mediate**” **revelation**: i.e., this means there is **something in the middle**, ... **something that is ‘seen,’ to teach us about that which is ‘unseen’**. ... i.e., God reveals himself in the created order, which we do see [with clear, plain evidence of **an intelligent designer**, a Creator and Maker who stands

behind the visible creation. ... And the fact that Paul says this leaves men “*without excuse*” means that this is sufficient for God to use at the final judgment to hold men accountable for their unbelief! The imprint of God is indelibly stamped on his creation.

**NOTE: The word “Agnostic,”** comes from the Greek word “GNOSTIC” meaning “to know.” The “a” at the beginning of this word means “no.” ... Thus, the word means “I do not know!” ... Human beings tend to think that being an “Agnostic” is less offensive than being an “Atheist,” because it seems to at least leave open the possibility that God does exist. And, this is the fundamental excuse both Atheists and Agnostics plan to use before God at the final judgment: “*But I didn’t know! ... If only you had made the proof of your existence more clear, my priorities would have been different, and I would have lived my life differently* [Richard Dawkins]. ...

However, as R.C. Sproul insists: ... this is even more offensive to God than being an Atheist, because it accuses God of being unjust and unfair because He has not given sufficient evidence, or proof of His existence to hold men accountable for unbelief. ... In fact, this is what Paul is referring to when he says: “*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*” ... i.e., **God is angered and offended by men who deny that the creation alone is sufficient evidence of the existence of God!** He declares them to be “*without excuse,*” and indicates that “*... because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed*” [Rom. 2:5]”

2. Because God has written the requirements of his law on men’s hearts [Romans 2:14-15a] ...

<sup>14</sup> (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts,

Of course, Paul’s assertion about the law of God being written on the hearts of men is a reference to **conscience!** It is a declaration that deep in the heart of every human being is a sense of right and wrong, because God has placed it there. ... This is also one of the grounds upon which God will hold unbelieving, unrepentant sinners guilty at the final judgment. ... Men may deny God’s standard and His laws. And claim there are no “absolutes;” ... but **Paul declares that down deep in their hearts, they know better!**

### The second consideration re. “The Psychology of Atheists:

The **psychological process** by which man “**suppresses**” the truth about God and “**exchanges**” it for something that is infinitely inferior, that which Paul says is “**a lie.**”

**Romans 1:21-23** – “<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.”

Here is Paul’s detailed definition of what he means by men “*suppressing the truth*” in verse 18! In this statement, Paul gives a **detailed description of ‘the psychological process’** by which men suppress the truth about God.

When Paul describes the truth about God that is revealed in the creation, **it is the truth about the existence and reality of God Himself**. Paul is saying that to ‘suppress’ this truth is EVIL! this is truth that GOD himself has manifested [grk. fanero]. The idea that is clearly expressed in this passage is that the truth God has given in his creation is not an obscure, oblique, subtle or vague disclosure of himself; but rather, it is clear and plainly evident; it is something that is unmistakable! And Paul is clearly saying that this truth is displayed to everyone! ... Paul is suggesting that, in the end, the question of God’s existence is not an ‘intellectual’ question, it is a moral question! People either submit to the plain, obvious truth of the existence of God that is evident in the creation, or, they deliberately deny **the obvious [and the underlying reason for this is their hatred for God!]**

- **The word for “Suppress” means to hold the truth down, to push something down by force!** It means: to hinder, to stifle, to repress. ... Sproul uses the illustration of a giant spring that is mashed and forced down [suggesting it is not easy to do!]

And what is most interesting about this text [regarding the psychology of atheism] is that: **the thing that is “suppressed” is not destroyed; ... rather, it is changed, and eventually it forces itself back to the surface in a different form [i.e. as a different god; ... one that is less fearful and threatening; one we like and can live with. Even Atheists are guilty of this, but even in the most extreme case, the Atheist is trying to drive God out of His creation. The Atheist wants to be rid of God! Psalm 10:4 says: “In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.” All this so there is no God to worry about!**

**Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre** [and many others like them] were deeply offended at the idea of a holy and just, **omniscient** God, who knew every detail of our thoughts, our motivations and our actions. So much so that they argued such a God could not exist because [they believed] man is free to choose [with impunity] and is autonomous. A sovereign, holy and just God is, therefore, to them, an impossibility, they argued. But the **motivation** underlying their atheistic philosophy was their overwhelming desire for freedom, ... unhindered freedom to do whatever they wanted to do with impunity; to live unhindered and without accountability! This required the elimination of a sovereign, omniscient God who is holy and just! **Therefore, they sought to ‘suppress’ the truth about God and force Him out of the creation.**

Therefore, Ludwick Fruerbacher and others were right when they suggested that man has the ability to fantasize and invent gods with whom he is comfortable

### **Summary of the psychology of atheists described by Paul in Romans 1:**

Paul is saying: God’s revelation comes, ... it goes in, we fear it, we bury it [suppress it], we exchange it, we bring it back out in the form of a lie that we can live with; a god who does not control us, but whom we can control to suit ourselves; ... a god who doesn’t know about our guilt and shame and who is powerless to judge us.

Our psychological process takes the true God and deforms, declaws, de-tooths, and disarms; and “exchanges” the image of the true God for a lie!

**Why do men do this? Why do they “suppress the truth”? Why do they deny the obvious evidence in the creation of an intelligent designer?**

**Because God is “Holy,” as indicated by the law of God: Romans 8:7 says: “The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” ... R.C. Sproul cites a sermon preached by Jonathan Edwards in 1736, titled: “Men are Naturally God’s Enemy.” Edwards noted that men find the**

**perfections of God distasteful!** Men [who are fundamentally **unholy creatures**] **have an aversion to a holy God!** ... And this 'aversion' is intensified when men realize that **God is not only 'holy,' but he is also 'omniscient'!**

Re. God's **OMNISCIENCE**: ... **Jean-Paul Sartre [the French Existential Philosopher]**, for example, couldn't stand the idea that God is omniscient, that everything that Sartre did and thought was known completely and comprehensively by God. [Deut. \_\_\_] Sartre reasoned: "... if I am under the gaze of God every moment, I can't truly be free!" – And, of course, such men want to be 'free' **with impunity**, ... to do whatever they want!

But **man's aversion to God is even further intensified** by the fact that God is also **OMNIPOTENT!** In other words, ... if there is a being out there who knows everything about me, but is '**powerless**' to do anything about it, ... that's one thing; ... **but God is also omnipotent!** He has the power to bring me before a final judgment and hold me accountable for my sins!

And then, finally, man's aversion is even further intensified by the fact that the God of the bible is **IMMUTABLE!** ... in other words, there is no possibility that, with the passage of time, God might 'change' and become less imposing and intimidating to man's conscience.

### **The Consequences of such depraved thinking ...**

In the Romans 1 passage, the apostle Paul clearly warns against such thinking and gives detailed examples of the sort of lifestyles it leads to and the final judgment of those who adopt this thinking and live accordingly.

v. 18 "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness ..."

v. 22 "They claimed to be wise, [but] became fools exchanging the glory of the immortal God for a lie" (v. 25); Psa. 14:1 – "The fool hath said in his heart: there is no God." –

R.C. Sproul – "A '**fool**' is someone whose thinking leads to futility and darkness."

v. 26 – "God gave them over to ... shameful lusts "

v. 24 "sinful desires" lifestyles that are corrupt and evil [I Cor. 6:12-14?]

v. 28 – "**a depraved [reprobate] mind**" **a person with a cursed conscience, that is so hardened it feels no remorse for wicked and vile acts and lifestyles.**

v. 29 "filled with every kind of wickedness" – look at our culture ...

2:5 – "stubborn – unrepentant – storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath." [Thess. – refuse to receive the love of the truth]

### **II Thess. 2:8-12**

"<sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, <sup>10</sup> and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie <sup>12</sup> and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

