

## exploreGOD

### "DOES GOD EXIST?"

#### ROMANS 1:18-32

### This Week's Core Competency

**Trinity** – I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 13:14, *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Scientists tell us that the universe is vast—so vast that it's nearly impossible to comprehend its immensity. At best, we barely grasp its enormity. The information we have is mind boggling, and the images we have are awe inspiring and baffling in equal measure. Consider the following: 1) *It is estimated that there are 400 billion, with a "b," stars in our galaxy.* Our sun is essential to us, the center of our solar system, and our source of light and energy, but it's just one of many, many stars that make up the Milky Way. 2) *There are probably more than 170 billion, with a "b," galaxies in the observable universe.* Different calculations provide different numbers for how many galaxies there are in the observable universe—the part of the universe we can see from earth with our current technology. There may be many more, but they are simply too far away for our telescopes to see. Astronomers have made their calculation using data from the Hubble Telescope. And galaxies are big. Ours is estimated to be 100,000 light years or 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 km across. The

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***That's here. That's home. That's us . . . a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.***

– Carl Sagan

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Andromeda galaxy is our closest galactic neighbor, roughly 2.5 million light-years away. Though it is 140,000 light-years across, it isn't bright enough to be seen in the night sky by our eyes. If it were brighter, it would appear six times larger than the full moon. 3) *There could be more than one universe.* This is more speculative theory than fact, but several branches of mathematics, quantum mechanics, and astrophysics have all come to similar conclusions: our universe is just one of many, and we actually exist in a 'multiverse.'

The haunting question of the psalmist is made even more poignant when we consider that he asked it while looking up. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place," he pondered, "what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" In 1990, as part of the spacecraft's ongoing mission, Voyager 1 turned its camera back on our home planet and took a picture, which became known as the "Pale Blue Dot." (Google "pale blue dot" or go to the Wikipedia article to see the image.) Seen from 6 billion kilometers away, the earth appears as a tiny blue speck in the depths of space.

Astronomer Carl Sagan, who first suggested the idea of the photograph, noted, "From this distant vantage point, the earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic

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doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam" (*Pale Blue Dot*, 6). What, indeed, are we that God cares for us?

The *cognitive* awe and wonder that brute facts about the universe produce in us, not to mention the *sensory* awe and wonder that experiences with nature produce in us—who hasn't been moved by a brilliant northwest sunset or the majestic Teton peaks, the pungent smell of the ocean or the touch of a gentle breeze?—should all be transferred to the Creator. The awe and wonder produced by contemplating the cosmos and our place in it should translate into reverence for the One who created our world (cf., v. 25, "who is forever praised. Amen"), but according to Paul, that's not what human beings do. In Romans 1, he makes it clear that God has revealed himself in what he has made. The infinite God has revealed his eternal power and divine nature in his vast creation "so that men are without excuse" (v. 19). However, men "exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (v. 25).

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Romans 1:18-32

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, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 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 men are without excuse.*

21 *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. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

24 *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things*

*rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

26 *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

28 *Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Bracket "wrath of God" in v. 18.
- \* Underline "is being revealed" in v. 18.
- \* Circle "godlessness" and "wickedness" in v. 18.
- \* Box "since," "because," and "for" indicating *reason* in vv. 19, 20.
- \* Box "so that" indicating *result* in v. 20.
- \* Circle "futile" in v. 21.
- \* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 21.
- \* Circle "glory" in v. 23.
- \* Circle "exchanged" in vv. 23, 25, 26.
- \* Underline "God gave them over" in vv. 24, 26, 28 ("he").
- \* Put parentheses around the words "sexual impurity" in v. 24, "shameful lusts" in v. 26, and "a depraved mind" in v. 28.
- \* Number the examples of "every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity" listed in vv. 30, 31.

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day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. How exactly is the wrath (or judgment) of God being revealed now?
2. Put the difference between "godlessness" and "wickedness" in your own words.
3. Explain how people "suppress the truth by their wickedness."
4. List some "invisible qualities" of God that you see clearly from creation.
5. Explain the *contrast* in verse 21.
6. How does verse 23 justify Paul's claim in verse 22?
7. What has *idolatry* got to do with *immorality*?
8. Explain the point of the *contrast* in verse 32.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the extent to which today's world fits Paul's description of his world.

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## day 3

## EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Paul's letter to the Romans is in large part about how God puts people right with himself through faith. It's about righteousness from God that is revealed in the gospel, righteousness that is by faith from first to last (1:17). Once he introduces his subject, the apostle goes on to show that all people need that righteousness. "Paul first underscores the sinful condition of the non-Jewish world (1:18-32). He points out how its rebellion against God's revelation of himself in nature and in the human conscience has led to terrible distortions of the natural order and to the worship of 'what God has created instead of the Creator himself' (1.25). The result of this is the revelation of God's wrath against 'all the sin and evil of men whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known' (1.18)" (Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 1).

Roman's 1:18-32 opens with the statement, "The wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men" (v. 18). Paul's use of the present tense implies God's wrath is being inflicted now (cf., v. 17). One commentator writes: "Paul speaks of wrath as a present reality under which people outside Christ stand, and often, following the OT prophets, predicts the outpouring of God's wrath on the future day of judgment. If the main verb in v. 18 is a 'futuristic present,' Paul could here also be predicting this climatic outbreak of wrath at the end of history, as in 2:5. But the verb is most likely depicting a present-time situation" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 100).

Reading on indicates that God's wrath or judgment is revealed in the fact that he has abandoned godless, wicked people to the consequences of their "sexual impurity" (v. 24), "shameful lusts" (v. 26), and "depraved mind" (v. 28). He made himself known to them in his creation. To be more specific, his power and divine nature were made evident to them from creation, which made denying his existence or distorting his being inexcusable. Nevertheless, they did just that. Rather than glorify the Creator as God and give him thanks, they preferred to speculate about creation and fill their minds with empty theories. Rather than worship the immortal God, they worshipped mortal things instead. The apostle puts it this way: "they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" (v. 22); "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25); and "their women exchanged

natural relations for unnatural ones" (v. 26) as did their men (v. 27). So God let them pursue the evil passions that followed on the heels of their rejection of him, and abandoned them to the consequences of their sexual impurity, homosexual relations, and depraved behavior. Again, Paul puts it this way: "God gave them over . . . to sexual impurity" (v. 24); "God gave them over to shameful lusts" (v. 26); and "he gave them over to a depraved mind" (v. 28). "The 'therefore' at the beginning of [verse 24] shows that God's 'handing over' of human beings is his response to their culpable rejection of the knowledge of himself that he has made generally available (vv. 21-23). Paul's use of the verb 'hand over' to describe this retribution has its roots in the OT, where it is regularly used in the stereotyped formula according to which God 'hands' over Israel's enemies so that they may be defeated in battle" (110).

Traditionally interpreters have read verses 26-27 as a condemnation of homosexual practices. Some in recent years have argued for a different understanding based on the meaning of the word "nature." According to them, Paul does not brand homosexuality as "unnatural," i.e., a violation of God's will, but given his own cultural prejudices, as "unnatural," i.e., a violation of what is the case among Jews. But as one commentator observes: "In keeping with the biblical and Jewish worldview, the heterosexual desires observed normally in nature are traced to God's creative intent. Sexual sins that are 'against nature' are also, then, against God, and it is this close association that makes it probable that Paul's appeal to 'nature' in this verse includes appeal to God's created order. In labeling the turning from 'the natural use' to 'that [use] which is against nature' an 'exchange,' Paul associates homosexuality with the perversion of true knowledge of God already depicted in vv. 23 and 25. In addition, we must remember that the clause in question is a description of 'sinful passions,' a phrase plainly connoting activities that are contrary to God's will. When these factors are considered, it is clear that Paul depicts homosexual activity as a violation of God's created order, another indication of the departure from true knowledge and worship of God" (115).

Adding insult to injury in the end, following a long list of vices, Paul makes it clear that although those who do such things know that they're doing wrong, they do them anyway and cheer on those who do likewise.

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## *The Message of the Passage*

*In spite of the fact that God has made his eternal power and divine nature plain in creation, people have refused to glorify him and give him thanks, so he has abandoned them to the results of their futile thinking: sexual impurity, shameful lusts, and a depraved mind.*

### day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the first two "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

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## notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 18 **is being revealed** Just as "a righteousness from God is being revealed" (v. 17) so also is "the wrath of God being revealed" (v. 18). "Wrath in God must not be conceived of in terms of the fitful passion with which anger is frequently associated in us. But to construe God's wrath as consisting simply in his purpose to punish sin or to secure the connection between sin and misery is to equate wrath with its effects and virtually eliminate wrath as a movement within the mind of God. Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 35). "Wrath is God's personal (though never malicious or, in a bad sense, emotional) reaction against sin. Properly, wrath belongs to the last day (ii. 5), but the idea of its anticipation in divine judgments is common" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 33-34).

v. 18 **godlessness** "The object of the divine wrath is twofold—'all the godlessness and wickedness of men.' Paul explicates the first term in vv. 19-27 and the second in vv. 28-32. 'Godlessness' means a lack of reverence, an impiety that arrays man against God, not simply in terms of neglect but also of rebellion. 'Wickedness' means injustice, relating to the vitiating of man's conduct toward his fellows. The two together serve to denote the failure of mankind in terms of the requirements of the two tables of the Decalogue" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:22). Put differently, "godlessness" refers to wrong action against God, and "wickedness" to wrong action against others. Together they amount to breaking the two great commandments (Mt 22:36-39).

v. 18 **suppress** "Whenever the truth starts to exert itself and makes them feel uneasy in their moral nature, they hold it down, suppress it. Some drown its voice by rushing into their immoralities; others strangle the disturbing voice by argument and by denial" (R. C. K. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, cited by Harrison, 23).

v. 20 **since** The temporal nuance of the word is made plain in the translation "ever since the creation of the world" (ESV, TEV). "Ever since God created the world translates the Greek noun phrase 'from the creation of the world'" (Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, HFT, 23). "God in his essence is hidden from human sight, yet much of him and much about him can be seen through the things he has made. Paul is thinking primarily of the world as the product of God's creation (see, e.g., Ps.8), though the acts of God in history may also be included" (Moo, 105).

v. 21 **futile** "Their thoughts have become complete nonsense and their empty minds are filled with darkness" (TEV). "The adjective rendered here 'empty' means 'stupid' or 'without understanding'" (Newman and Nida, 24). "Human beings perverted their knowledge and sank into idolatry" (Moo, 107). "It is highly suggestive that the verb 'to become futile' yields a noun form that was used for idols (Acts 14:15). Idols are unreal and unprofitable, and their service can only lead to futility and further estrangements from the true and living God" (Harrison, 23).

v. 22 **images** The majesty of creation reflects the glory of the immortal God, not the shame of mortal creatures. "In modern times the western world has outgrown crass idolatry, but humanism has subtly injected the worship of man without the trappings. God is quietly ruled out and man is placed on the throne" (23- 24).

v. 24 **gave them over** Cf. Ps 81:12. "God's displeasure is expressed in his abandonment of the persons concerned to more intensified and aggravated cultivation of the lusts of their own hearts with the result that they reap for themselves a correspondingly greater toll of retributive vengeance" (Murray, 44, 45). "The implication is that God has deserted them and let them go their own way" (Newman and Nida, 26).

v. 24 **sexual impurity** Once God is ruled out, people are left with license to pursue their unbridled passions. Immorality inevitably follows on the heels of impiety.

v. 25 **truth of God** I.e., God's truth, the truth that belongs to him or perhaps the truth about him that he has made known in creation, rather than the truth that he exists (contra Moo, 112).

v. 26, 27 **unnatural** Paul condemns homosexual, relations calling it "unnatural," "indecent," and a "perversion." To argue that he is condemning pagan cultic practices or promiscuous homosexual relations but not homosexuality per se is strained to say the least (see D. F. Wright, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, s.v., "Homosexuality," 413). For example, according to one writer, "Paul did not discuss gay persons but only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons. It is not clear that Saint Paul distinguished, as we must, between homosexual persons and heterosexual persons who behave like homosexuals, but what is clear is that what is 'unnatural' is the one behaving after the manner of the other" (Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book*, 157).

v. 32 **approve** "They were guilty of the crowning offense of applauding those who practiced wickedness in its various manifestations" (Harrison, 26-27).

## Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Parents, I am very excited about our exploreGod series for kids! Throughout the next six weeks, we will be talking about some foundational truths of our faith. We will answer some great questions like: Will God always be there for me? Is the Bible true? What is God like? I love how Pantego Bible Church is committed to equipping parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their kids. It is our God-given responsibility and privilege. These next six weeks will give you an opportunity to have life changing discussions with your kids. I am praying that we will have the urgency and create the time to have meaningful conversations. Dr. Albert Mohler says, "Parenthood is not a hobby, but represents one of the most crucial opportunities for making saints found in this life... This reminds us of our responsibility to raise boys to be husbands and fathers and girls to be wives and mothers. God's glory is seen in this, for the family is the critical arena where the glory of God is either displayed or denied. It is just as simple as that." May we be a church that is displaying God's glory in our families! It's hard work, and we don't always do it perfectly, but we are in this together. May our families be strengthened and changed as we explore God together.

### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 1:20-25

1. What "invisible qualities" of God are listed in verse 20?
2. What happened when people stopped glorifying God?
3. What did people exchange the truth of God for?

### What Do You Think

1. Why do you think people made idols to worship instead of worshipping God?
2. How do we keep our hearts and minds focused on God?

### What R U Going To Do

Psalm 19:1 - "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Either take a picture or draw a picture of a beautiful sunset and write this verse on it. Post it where you can be reminded of God's glory!

## MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Trinity - I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Memory Verse

Psalm 145:1 - I will exalt you, My God and King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.

## KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC \_\_\_\_ and Verse \_\_\_\_\_. Family completed **Say** \_\_\_\_\_ **Think** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.  
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

**Tom Bulick** (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-six years and have one son, Zach.

**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).