

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

If someone were to ask you to explain what you believe as a Christian, where would you begin? When you think about all of the topics that make up Christian doctrine and Christian living, where to begin? Well, this isn't a pass/fail question; there is not one topic that you absolutely *must* begin with. For example, our four confessions of faith each begin with a different topic:

- The Heidelberg Catechism begins with a question about our only comfort,
- the Westminster Confession of Faith begins with an article about Holy Scripture,
- the Canons of Dort begin with an article about mankind's fallen and sinful condition,
- and the Belgic Confession of Faith, as we just read, begins with God: “*We believe with the heart and confess with the mouth ... God.*”

And there are good reasons why each begins as it does. But the reason why the Belgic begins with God is not difficult to work out. As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, right? And how does the Bible begin? It begins with God. “*In the beginning, God.*” Without God, there is no creation, there is no us, there is nothing to believe and there is nothing to confess. But there is a God and He has revealed Himself to us in His Word. So we need to know who He is because who He is will dictate what we believe and how we live in His creation.

Let me illustrate it like this: If you were new to Auckland and I asked you who was in charge of Auckland and what responsibilities you have as a citizen of Auckland, and you said, No one is in charge of Auckland or a purple jellyfish is in charge of Auckland, and you don't have to pay rates if you don't want to and you can put your rubbish bin out any day of the week and it will be emptied, I would have to tell you that you are wrong. I would have to tell you that you cannot just believe what you want to believe about life in Auckland! Auckland has a mayor. His name is Phil Goff. He is a 65 year old man with grey hair and green eyes, who was previously a Labour party MP, and he became mayor in 2016. And he is in charge of Auckland. And there is a particular amount of rates that you have to pay and there is only one day a week when you can put your rubbish bin out for emptying. And if that is true of life in Auckland, then it is true and even more important in terms of life in God's creation. Who God is affects every aspect of what we believe and how we live.

And that is the message of our text in Romans. In vv16-17, the Apostle Paul presents the gospel as ***the cure***, if you like. And of course, whenever someone talks about a cure, the next question is: What is the disease that needs curing? So what this passage reveals is that **Right Belief is the Cure for Unbelief and All of its Consequences**. And we will consider this passage under two headings – firstly, **The God We Must Believe in**, and secondly, **Why Believing in this God Matters**.

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I. So first of all, let’s think about **The God We Must Believe in**.

- A. We made the point at the beginning of the sermon that the Bible begins with God. He doesn’t offer proofs for His existence; He just declares His existence. And here in Romans 1, we are told that everyone knows that God exists. Look at v19, “*What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*” And v20 explains that God reveals Himself in creation.
1. **Psalm 19** talks about this when it says, “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.*” **Psalm 145**, which we read earlier, says, “*On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds ... They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.*” So whether you are looking at the stars in the sky through a telescope or the tiniest molecule through a microscope or any event in history, the message proclaimed is God!
  2. So the problem is not that God is hidden and unknowable – His creation alone is enough for a person to know the truth about God. The problem is described at the end of v18 – sinful and unconverted mankind **actively suppresses the truth about God**. And this means that God is ignored or denied or that He is replaced with another god or philosophy.
  3. It is like the point we made at the beginning about the mayor of Auckland. If you find a person who rejects Phil Goff as mayor of Auckland you can be sure that he or she will claim allegiance to another authority, and that they do not want to keep all or some of the rules of life in Auckland.
  4. And that is Paul’s exact point here. Look at v21, “*For although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 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 reptiles.*” And in v25, “*They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*” So mankind gives itself an excuse to live as it pleases by embracing another god of its own invention.
- B. But what does v20 tell us about the God of the Bible? “*His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and His divine nature, have been clearly perceived...*” And of course, this is not a full description of God, but it is a **significant** description of God. We have to look at the whole Bible to get a full description of God. And as we do that, we see that the God we must believe in is the God described in Article 1 of our confession of faith. And we can divide this description into two main parts – His **being** and His **attributes** or characteristics. And whole books have been written about each of the things in this list, but we shall have to be satisfied today with one or two sentences about each.
1. Let’s begin with God’s **BEING** – Who He is.

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- a. And first of all we see that there is only **ONE** God. And obviously, we shall have more to say about this when we come to the article that deals with the Trinity – the three persons of the God – but there is only one God.
    - (1). **Deuteronomy 4:39**, “Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.”  
**Deuteronomy 32:39**, “See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside me.”
    - (2). There are not many gods, this world is not about Ying and Yang or Good vs Evil, and we cannot say that everything is god, like those who worship Mother Nature, for example. There is only one God.
  - b. And God is a **SIMPLE** being – Now, you walk into my study and you will see three whole walls lined with books. And those books are all about God in one way or another. So perhaps you are wondering about this word simple? Well, simple does not mean easy or simplistic. What it means is that God is not made up of various parts. He is not one part Father and another part Jesus, He is not one part love and another part justice, and He is not body and soul. God is everything in this list, always, and completely. And this is an important for two reasons:
    - (1). Firstly, to keep us from playing off one attribute against another, like emphasizing His love and neglecting His justice. And sadly, this is what many professing Christians do when they refuse to talk about sin or the law or hell and only say that God loves you. That is not the God of the Bible.
    - (2). But it is important, secondly, because your salvation depends on the simplicity of God’s being. For God to be able to *totally* love you, He must have His justice *totally* satisfied. And that is what Christ’s death on the cross is all about – justice totally satisfied, sins completely punished. For that leaves God free to love you, completely. Do you see how important that is? You know that you still sin. So you could mistakenly think that God loves you but He is also a bit angry with you. No, He *only* loves you because He has dealt with all your sin in Christ!
  - c. And next, God is **SPIRIT** – In **John 4:24**, Jesus said, “*God is Spirit.*” God does not have a body like you and me. Now, Jesus took to Himself a body like ours. But God in His essential being is Spirit. He is not limited or bound; He is free. This is why He is present everywhere or omnipresent.
  - d. So in terms of God’s being, He is “One God, who is a simple and spiritual being.”
2. But now we need to consider His **ATTRIBUTES** or characteristics:
    - a. And they divide into two groups, the first of which we call His ***incommunicable*** attributes. And they are incommunicable because they are those aspects of God that He does *not* communicate to or share with us as His creatures:
      - (1). The first of these is that God is **ETERNAL**. This is referred to in v20.

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- (a). It means that God is without beginning and without end. He created time and He is not ruled by or constrained by time.
  - (b). **Psalm 90:2** says, “*From everlasting to everlasting you are God.*” He is described in **Revelation 1:8** as “*the Alpha and the Omega ... who was and who is and who is to come.*”
  - (c). Now, in a second hand book I bought, the previous owner of the book had written above the chapter about God’s eternality that this doctrine is “a pain in the brain!”
- (2). And that is actually what the next attribute of God is about as we confess that He is **INCOMPREHENSIBLE**.
- (a). Incomprehensible means unable to be fully understood and known. We can know what God has revealed about Himself in creation and in the Bible, but we cannot know everything there is to know about God.
  - (b). A man named Zophar spoke about this in **Job 11**. He said, “*Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens ... They are deeper than the depths of the grave ... Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.*”
  - (c). Now, that is a God worth worshipping!
- (3). And God is also **INVISIBLE**.
- (a). This means that He cannot be seen. Yes, OT saints saw burning bushes and pillars of fire and God in the form of a man, but these are what are called theophanies – visible manifestations of God. But they were not God *as He is*. And we know this because **1 John 4:12** says, “*No one has ever seen God.*”
- (4). But God is also **IMMUTABLE**.
- (a). And this means that *He* does not change and His *plans* do not change and His *attitude* does not change. In **Malachi 3:6**, God said, “*For I the LORD do not change.*”
- (5). And God is also **INFINITE**.
- (a). And what this means is that God is not limited by anything. Paul spoke about this when he preached in Athens. He said, “*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*”
  - (b). And the infiniteness of God is important for the attributes that follow – there are no limits to God’s power or His wisdom or His justice or His goodness, etc.
- b. And that brings us to the next attributes of God which are the ones that we call His **communicable** attributes. And we call them that because He does communicate them to or share them with us in a limited way – we also have some power, wisdom, justice, and goodness.
- (1). So the first of God’s communicable attributes is that He is **ALMIGHTY**.

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- (a). And this attribute really is self-explanatory – God is ALL mighty! There is no limit to His power! We see this in creation as He speaks the whole universe into existence and we see it in the story of Jonah as God causes a tiny worm to appear and nibble away a tree that was providing Jonah with shade. It is why we learn as children to sing, “My God is so *BIG*, so *STRONG* and so *MIGHTY*, there’s *NOTHING* my God can not do. It’s true!”
- (2). But God is also perfectly **WISE**. There is nothing that God does not know and He uses His knowledge perfectly, always, to achieve His good purposes.
- (3). And God is also **JUST**.
- (a). And there is no better way to illustrate this attribute of God than to point to the two times in the Bible that an attribute of God is repeated three times. In **Isaiah 6** and **Revelation 4**, God is described as “*holy, holy, holy.*” God is pure and He only ever does what is good and right.
- (b). **1 John 1:5** says that “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*” This is why He requires us to be perfectly pure and to always do what is good and right. And this is what our text in Romans explores and what we shall return to in a moment.
- (4). But lastly, God is also **GOOD** and **THE OVERFLOWING FOUNTAIN OF ALL GOOD**. And our confession very deliberately emphasizes the goodness of God in this way. You see, we can easily make the mistake of thinking about God as a kind of cosmic police officer, there to punish us when we break the law. Now, God will punish unbelief on Judgment Day. Our text is very clear about that. But the reason He has given us His word and His Son is so that we might see that He is good. **Psalm 86:5**, “*For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.*” **James 1:17**, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.*” God wants us to know that He is good and the overflowing fountain of all good.

C. Now, I cannot physically put this God in front of you. But He has revealed Himself in creation and in the Bible. What you must do is to **believe** in Him. **Hebrews 11:6** says, “*Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*” You must choose to believe in Him. And I have to go further than this and warn you that if you choose not to believe in Him, you are a **fool**. And this is not me resorting to cheap name-calling, this is what God Himself says in the Bible. Earlier we sung those words from Psalm 53, “*The fool says in his heart, there is no God.*” The person who denies the God of the Bible is as foolish, or actually *more* foolish, than the person who denies that Phil Goff is the Mayor of Akld. Believe in the God of the Bible because He is God and He does exist and He rewards those who seek Him!

- II. And this leads us into our second point, which I promise will be very brief, which is **WHY BELIEF IN GOD MATTERS**. And it matters for two main reasons:
- A. First, it matters for **morality**, as we see in vv24-32.
1. A few weeks ago, the public memorial service for the CHCH mosque shootings began with the Muslim call to prayer. And I made the comment on that Sunday that the reason why our government allowed this is out of respect for the Muslim victims and their families, but also because our secular government doesn't actually believe that prayer to any god – Islam, Christian, Buddha – really matters.
  2. Well, the message of our text is that it really does matter. The message of our text is that if society rejects the God of the Bible, life in society will get increasingly wicked. When God is rejected and replaced with idols or other gods or no god, God then gives people over to impurity, natural sexual relationships are exchanged for unnatural sexual activity, God gives people up to a debased or depraved mind, and they become full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossip, slander, hatred of God, rudeness, pride, boasting, new forms of evil, disrespectful and disobedient, foolishness, faithlessness, and cruelty.
  3. And is this not exactly what we are seeing in NZ society today? God and the Bible have been tossed out of the windows of parliament, the universities, the media, and, sadly, many churches. And we have a society that is increasingly immoral, idolatrous, and unjust. Abortion liberalization, euthanasia coming, if not now, soon, a total disrespect for parents and teachers and the police, mental health hospitals beyond packed, homelessness and drug dependency on the rise, family violence at epidemic levels, fake news because its all about gossip and clickbait and there is no objective truth anymore, corporate greed, and we could go on and on...
  4. And the fact is that this downward spiral of immorality will continue until individuals and families and villages and towns and nations turn to God in repentance and faith. This is why training ministers and planting churches and evangelism is so important. This is praying for revival and reformation is so important.
- B. And this brings us to our final point, which is that belief in God matters for **SALVATION**, as we see in vv16-18.
1. As we have seen, God is just and good.
    - a. As a **just** God, He cannot overlook sin and unbelief; it must be punished. Verse 18 describes this as the “*wrath of God*.” And all who refuse to believe in God will endure God's wrath in hell. Psalm 145:20b says, “*All the wicked [God] will destroy*.”
    - b. But God is also good. Our text talks about the possibility of “*salvation for everyone who believes*.” Psalm 145:17-0a says, “*The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call on Him ... He also hears their cry and saves them*.” And can save us because He sent His own Son to die on the cross to endure the punishment that our sin deserves. And if you believe that Jesus did this for

you, your sins are forgiven and you receive His righteousness. That is the “*righteousness of God*” that v17 talks about. So to be saved is to possess the righteousness of Jesus.

- c. And we *need* His righteousness! Our best efforts to be good are feeble and fickle. And we continue to sin, sometimes grievously. So we have much reason for doubt and despair. But the righteousness of Jesus, because He is God, is almighty and infinite and unchanging and eternal. And if we have believed, we possess the righteousness of Jesus!

(1). **John Bunyan** wrote the wonderful book, ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress.’ He said, “I saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Do you see why belief in the God of the Bible matters for salvation? It is only from Him that we can receive the righteousness of Christ! And it is only because of Christ that we can have confidence and certainty that we truly are saved! Hallelujah! Amen.