

Introduction

Today I'm going to violate a rule of grammar. The adverb is not our friend. It's the weak tool of a lazy mind. Don't use adverbs in other words. But I'm using one, "**really**," because it drives home the point I want to make in closing out our worldview month. That point relates to the first and foundational worldview question, "**What is "prime reality?"**" Prime reality refers to what James Sire calls the "**really real**," the reality of all realities. Well, what is that?

What Is Really Real

Setting aside the irrationality of Eastern religions and the West's New Age Movement, the really real is one of two things.

It may be a spiritual being of some kind called "**God**." By "**spiritual**," I mean not comprised of matter. This being is essentially unembodied personal consciousness and power – having limitless abilities to think and act without a brain and body.

If the really real isn't a spiritual being, then it's matter. Matter is atoms and molecules and everything they form. We call what they form, generally, nature or the physical universe.

Those then are the most viable answers to the first worldview question. The really real is either God or matter. So, which is it? If we gather all the evidence (information) and follow it to where it leads, we learn the answer. It's God! I don't have time in one sermon to discuss all of that evidence. It'd take a month of Sundays to do so. But I will discuss the evidence Paul does in our text.

In verses 18-32, he describes what he calls in verse 22 "**fools**," the Greek word meaning people who are morally dim. As verse 18 states it, they commit ungodly or unrighteous acts, even "**indecent**" or perverse ones. Those perverse ones include homosexuality, verses 26-27.

Paul pinpoints the cause of their moral ruin. He asserts in verse 21 that they "**know God**." They know that He exists and that He's eternally

powerful and divine, verse 20. They know that because He made it **“evident”** to them, verse 19. He made it so evident in fact that they’re **“without excuse,”** verse 20. Yet, they don’t believe it, verse 21. They have all the evidence they need but won’t follow it where it leads. They don’t believe God exists, in other words, because they don’t want to.

This is an instructive text. It teaches us that if we’re objective pursuers of truth, we can actually know not just believe that God exists and that He’s powerful and divine. We can know that by gathering the evidence and following it where it leads.

I’m going to focus on just one piece of that evidence, the piece Paul focuses on. It’s **“what has been made,”** verse 20. His claim here is simple and clear. *The physical universe is conclusive evidence for the existence of God.* Don’t ever forget that. *The physical universe is conclusive evidence for the existence of God.* The fundamental nature of the physical universe, with all of its equations, formulas, and processes, is obviously not random but ordered and complex. It exudes design and as logic tells us, design must have a designer, which in this case is God.

Interestingly enough, early classical thinkers like Plato and Aristotle believed and taught that very precept. They didn’t know about the Biblical God. But they believed and taught that the physical world clearly demonstrates the existence of a spiritual reality that created and sustains it. Epictetus, a famous Stoic philosopher and contemporary of Paul, agreed. He attributed the order of the physical world to the goodwill and work of **“Providence.”** He wrote: **“Is not the order in things, an order obvious to thought, sufficient to prevail on men and make them ashamed of leaving an artificer (maker) out of their scheme? Let them explain to us how it is possible that things so wonderful, and which carry such marks of contrivance, should come to pass spontaneously and without design.”** We now know that physical reality is far more ordered and complex than those classical thinkers ever imagined. The existence of a conscious and powerful spiritual reality, therefore, is even more evident to us than it was to them. In the end,

physical reality gives an *irresistible* impression of a **“maker.”**

Grasp what that implies. Any objective thinker, who follows the evidence where it leads, will conclude that the really real is a spiritual being called God. Antony Flew, a legendary British philosopher, was one of the most notable atheists in the world. But the developing knowledge of molecular mechanisms and DNA caused a monumental shift in his worldview. He came to believe in a creator God because **“the integrated complexity of life can only be explained in terms of an Intelligent Source.”** Flew’s peers ostracized and scathingly criticized him as a result but he didn’t care. He simply replied: **“Well, that’s too bad. My whole life has been guided by the principle of *Plato’s Socrates*: Follow the evidence, wherever it leads.”** Do that. Follow the evidence where it leads. You’ll conclude that the really real is God.

What Is the Really Real Like

But what is the nature of the really real? What is God like in other words? Paul tells us, generally, in verse 20. He is **“divine.”** The Greek word translated **“divine”** suggests a nature that transcends the nature of everything else that exists. Everything else that exists is existence-dependent and finite (limited). God, in contrast, is self-existent and infinite (limitless). Or as Paul says it, He’s **“divine.”**

He mentions one way He is in verse 20. God’s **“power”** is **“eternal”** or limitless. One aspect of His power is the energy available to him. Our sun produces the same energy every second as a trillion megaton bombs. But it’s only an average star, one of 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 in the observable universe. God, as creator, must logically have more energy than all of those stars combined. He’s limitlessly powerful.

Those are just two facts about God that we can deduce from the nature of the physical universe. He is divine and limitlessly powerful.

There are others of course. Consider quantum physics, the science of atomic particles, for instance. Scientists still don’t understand why matter behaves the way it does at the quantum level. It’s weird. That’s

why the renowned astrophysicist Carl Sagan said what he did. Quantum physics is so strange that **“common sense is almost useless in approaching it.”** We can deduce from the behavior of atomic particles that God has a mind, that inventiveness is one aspect of it, and that His inventiveness is limitless.

As that example shows, we can deduce many of God’s **“attributes”** as verse 20 calls them from the nature of the physical universe.

Doing so thoughtfully and thoroughly reveals something about Him. He is an utterly separate and superior kind of reality. No other reality is even remotely like Him or opposite Him. He is the dominant of all realities. He is the really real, in other words, the reality of all realities.

Know the Really Real

Because He is, we absolutely positively must accommodate ourselves to Him. We must act appropriately pursuant to His nature. Noted atheist Aldous Huxley described the substance of the material world as monotony, poverty of soul, and pain. Jesus, in contrast, described the substance of God’s kingdom as abundance and fullness of joy. If we don’t accommodate ourselves to God, monotony, poverty of soul, and pain are our lot in life. If we do, abundance and fullness of joy are. It’s as simple as that. So let’s accommodate ourselves to God.

Another **“attribute”** of His shows how we do that.

I’d make an observation about humans. We aren’t just material. We’re also personal. Think of the affection of a mother’s love for her newborn baby, the excitement of achieving a long-pursued goal, the joy of creating a thing of beauty, and so on. There are things about us that transcend the formulas, equations, and processes of the physical universe: hope of purpose, sense of significance, motions of morality, joy of beauty, twinges of guilt, sacrifices of love, and much more. Humans are far more than material. We’re personal as well.

We must infer, therefore, that God is too. Most naturalists admit the personal nature of humans but contend it evolved from matter plus

time and chance. But that isn't possible. Good logic tells us that what is personal can't come from what is impersonal, matter. It has to come from a personal source. God, as creator of humans, is that source. So He must be personal and is. He is capable of knowing and being known.

That is a stunning fact that implies how we accommodate ourselves to Him. We know Him. Philosophy rightly distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge, which teach us how to know Him.

First, we know Him **"by description."** This is knowledge at a distance. It's knowing facts about something, in this case, God.

Two sources disclose those facts. One, in verse 20, is the physical universe. We get knowledge implicitly by thoughtfully observing and analyzing it. The other source is the Bible, which is God's written word to us. We get knowledge explicitly by carefully interpreting it. The physical universe and the Bible are our sources of knowledge *about* God. They disclose the facts *about* Him that we need to know.

So, we learn as many of those facts as we can. We then apply good logic to the facts we've learned to infer other facts. We ask and answer this question about each fact we learn, **"If this is so, what must also be so?"** The result is what we call our **"vision of God."**

I carefully interpreted verse 20, for example. **"Eternal power"** means His power and energy are limitless. I also asked a question, **"If this is so, what must also be so?"** Two answers are **"Everything He does is effortless to Him"** and **"He never has less energy after doing something than He had before doing it."** That illustrates what we do. Learn as many facts as we can about God, which is knowledge by description.

Now, knowledge by description clearly doesn't have the same power over life as the second kind of knowledge does. But it is linked to the second kind of knowledge. It directs and supports it.

We know God in a second way, **"by acquaintance."** This is knowledge up close, personal relationship in other words. Bible scholar Derek Kidner talks about **"divine-human interplay."** Interplay is the

essence of relationship. In my relationship with my wife, for instance, I speak and listen to her and she speaks and listens to me. And I act in relation to her and she acts in relation to me. We're deeply involved in each other's lives so that there's constant interplay or interaction between us. It's the same, or at least can be, with God.

His part in the divine-human interplay is to speak, listen, and act in relation to us. Our part is to speak, listen, and act in relation to Him as much as we can in day-to-day life. We do that in practical ways, which you can learn in the *First Aim* study on our church's website. We learn the central activities for interacting with God and then devotedly practice them. We'll eventually know Him by acquaintance if we do.

One of those activities, for instance, is what Thomas Watson called "**the musing of the mind on God,**" what Brother Lawrence called "**the practice of the presence of God.**" Using the descriptive knowledge we have, we place our minds on Him as much as we can. So, clicking my computer's mouse makes me think about God. He creating the universe took less effort for Him than clicking the mouse took for me. Or getting tired makes me think about God. He had no less energy after creating the universe than He did before creating it. Because He's all-knowing and everywhere present, thoughts like those immediately engage and move Him, deepening the relationship we have with each other.

Those then are the two ways that we know God. By description – we know Him intellectually. By acquaintance – we know Him experientially.

Conclusion

I leave you in closing with the stirring words of A.W. Tozer in that regard: "**The Bible assumes as a self-evident fact that men can know God with at least the same degree of immediacy as they know any other person or thing that comes within the field of their experience.**" He was right. So let's do it. Let's know God. We'll know the "**really real**" and have abundance and joy if we do.