

# Futile Speculations

By Dave DeWitt

**Romans 1:21** *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became **futile** [useless or pointless] in their **speculations**.*

**Proverbs 21:2** *Every man's way is right in his own eyes...*

For a long time now, I have asked myself, “Why do seemingly otherwise normal people, believe in so many things that are sheer nonsense, ideas without any observation at all?” We humans seem to have the tendency to either ignore reality completely or ignore reason as a basis for determining what is real. Why do we do that? Here are some thoughts I have gathered on the subject. I shall list a few futile speculations, observe some characteristics they have in common, and attempt a Biblical explanation.

## Futile Speculations Today

Here are some futile speculations, irrational ideas that seemingly sane people sincerely believe. None of these have any basis in reality.

- **The Flat-Earth Theory.** This ludicrous idea is actually gaining in popularity, even among “Christians.” The theory states that the earth is a flat round disk, with the north pole at the center and Antarctica being a wall of ice around the rim. “Christian” flat-earthers believe the Bible teaches a flat earth. **But** no actual evidence, like, say, a picture of a flat earth from space, has ever been presented. No author of the Bible ever described the earth as a flat disk.
- **Mysticism.** This is when faith becomes superstition, “a widely held but unjustified belief in supernatural causation leading to certain consequences of an action or event, or a practice based on such a belief” (“New Oxford American Dictionary”). For some reason, we love mysticism. It dominates everything from Harry Potter’s Hogwarts mysteries to “Christians” claiming God “called me,” “spoke to me,” or “led me.” Christian mysticism is a “supernatural causation” which comes from circumstances, feelings, or coincidental encounters. **But** this is without any observations which can be evaluated rationally. From Genesis to Revelation, God never revealed anything to anybody that way. Christian mysticism assumes the mystic knows what God is doing in their lives. That’s what Job and his friends were criticized for (Job 42:7). The Bible is completely non-mystical.
- **Evolution.** This is the idea that all biological life came from a common ancestor, ultimately from a pre-historic soup of chemicals. **But** this theory is totally without any observation anywhere. No one has ever observed any creature become, or starting to become, a different kind of creature. Adaptation, which is common everywhere, is given the name “micro evolution,” as if it had anything to do with creatures becoming different kinds of creatures. Instead, what we universally observe is that all living creatures reproduce *after their kind* (Genesis 1:11-25). The evidence for evolution is the same as that for a flat earth and mysticism. “0.”
- **Cults** (Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, etc.). Cults are religious groups that base their beliefs on stories about personal revelations. **But** these stories are always unable to be observed and verified by rational investigation.
- **World Religions.** Three of the five major world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam) are based in superstition and a blind-leap faith **but** have no foundation in reason applied to reality.
- **The Prosperity Gospel.** This is the idea that God will prosper people who perform some specific task, usually giving money to the Prosperity Gospel evangelist or preacher. **But** there is no objective way to quantify that people who give money get more money in return. For example, if 10 people give an evangelist \$1000, can we quantify that in a given amount of time (say, 30 days) that all 10 will have an income increase (of say \$2000 or whatever the evangelist specifies)?
- **Relative Truth.** This is the idea that what is true for one person in one place at one time is not necessarily true for all people in all places at all times. Nearly every professor in nearly every public

university believes truth is relative. **But** this is contrary to all reality. No truth is ever relative. Truth, the way things actually are, is the same for everybody everywhere and for all time. For example, if I feel warm now but you feel cold now, it is just as true for you as it is for me that I feel warm. It is true for everybody everywhere for all time that I feel warm now, if I feel warm now.

- **Life from Outer Space.** This idea says that life on earth came from life on other planets. It recognizes that a living cell needs oxygen to survive, yet that same oxygen would destroy it by burning up the inner components of the cell. There is therefore no possible atmosphere on a prehistoric earth where a living cell could evolve. Therefore, some evolutionists speculate that life must have come here from another planet. **But** there is no evidence that life could come from non-life on any other planet either. Pushing the problem off to another planet does not solve anything. Besides, no such planet exists by observation. We have no evidence at this point that there is biological life anywhere in the universe except on earth. All such theories are without any observation whatsoever.
- **Idolatry.** This is the idea that non-living material objects, such as statues, paintings, crystals, or dream catchers, made out of material substances such as wood, stone or feathers, can have spiritual qualities and depict a divine presence. **But** this is completely outside any observable reality.

## Common Characteristics of Futile Speculations

1. The futile speculations we humans come up with are concluded by ignoring the only way all truth is determined. By all observation, and without any exception, it is undeniable that

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Truth (the way things actually are) is always determined by applying reason to real observations</b></p>
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Biblical authors assume and use reason, persuasion, and evidence as a basis for knowing truth.

**Isaiah 1:18** *“Come now, and let us **reason** together,” says the Lord...*

**Mark 12:24** *Jesus said to them, “Is this not the **reason** you are mistaken, that you **do not understand** the Scriptures or the power of God?”*

**Acts 17:2-3** *And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, **explaining and giving evidence...***

2. Futile speculations are most often believed in community. They are usually believed because speculators are surrounded by others who believe the same thing, or a similar thing. The number of people believing an idea should never be used to determine its truth. All cults and world religions do that. Every view listed above, except the flat-earth theory, has a great many people who believe it. But remember, at one time the flat-earth theory was the dominant “scientific” belief.
3. For sure, there are some charlatans just after money or fame. But most people who believe futile speculations are sincere. For example, most evolutionists in the various fields of science sincerely believe in evolution, not because it has ever been observed but because it is assumed and never challenged.
4. The tendency to make futile speculations is universal among all human beings. We can be sure we are all making futile speculations about something. Speculations can be innocent if we label them as such and don’t base anything on them. Speculations become dangerous when we build our thoughts and conclusions about life and God upon them. Jesus said, *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock ... Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand”* (Matthew 7:24, 26). Applying a rational understanding of Jesus’ real words is building on a rock. Speculating about what new things you think Jesus might be telling you today, and applying that, is building a house upon the sand.
5. The motives people have for their futile speculations are hard to determine. The specific motives a given individual might have, for believing a specific futile speculation, are usually not able to be rationally determined. If the individual has not stated a motive, guessing about it is itself usually a speculation. “They are just in it for the money...power...fame, etc.” is usually itself a speculation.
6. Futile speculations are contrary to wisdom. Proverbial wisdom bases understanding on rationally observing what usually happens most of the time. Therefore, futile speculations are the enemy of wisdom.

Solomon said,

**Proverbs 1: 5, 7** *A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

**Proverbs 1:20-22** *Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?..."*

7. Futile speculations come from the human spirit. Here's why. Humans are the only physical beings who have a spiritual nature (often called the "soul" and evidenced by thoughts about purpose and destiny, a morality, and creative ability). Besides a physical body, animals only have a personality (intellect, emotion, and will), so their motives are all physical in nature (basically, the continuation of the species). Animals apply instincts to observations, so they never make futile speculations. Humans are spiritual beings and constantly make futile speculations. Therefore, we can conclude that futile speculations are spiritually-determined.
8. Futile speculations are a product of the sin nature. Sin always perverts something good. Good and bad are not some yin/yang, co-equal forces. Sin cannot exist unless it has something good to pervert. Reason, applied to a real observation, is the only inescapable way to determine the way things actually are. It is therefore good. Sin perverts that by either avoiding reason or ignoring observations.

## **A Biblical Explanation for Futile Speculations**

Most of us Bible-believing Christians will probably go to the influence of Satan and demons for an explanation as to why people believe futile speculations. That's certainly possible, since we know *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving* (2 Corinthians 4:4), and we are told, *put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11). But when the Apostle Paul used the term in Romans 1, he did not mention Satan or demons. So, whatever their role might be, it is not the only explanation, nor is their involvement necessary, for people to believe nonsense. Let's go to Paul's explanation.

**Romans 1:21-25** *For even though they knew God, they did not honor [better, glorify] 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. Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

**1 Timothy 1:3-4** *...instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere **speculation** rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.*

Let's observe what Paul said in Romans 1 about people who made futile speculations:

- *They did not glorify [attribute innate value to] Him [God] as God.*
- They did not *give thanks* to God. That is, instead of being thankful for what God created, they believed some unfounded idea that someone imagined.
- *Their foolish heart was darkened.* The word for *foolish* here is "without understanding," and the *heart* metaphor in the Bible connects personality with spirituality. *Darkened* implies perversion by their sin nature. So, their sin nature polluted their intellect into creating a belief in something for which there was no observation in reality.
- They began *professing* [themselves] *to be wise*, which is why *they became fools*. When a futile speculator begins proclaiming a foolish idea, then we can all examine it and see how ludicrous it is. Of course, other non-discerning people may follow them, but when they profess themselves *to be wise*, rational discerning people can look at what they profess and determine them to be *fools*.

- *God gave them over in the lusts [or desires] of their hearts.* Some wrong (perverted) desire, caused by the sin nature, is the only motive Paul offers.
- They *exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for a lie*, i.e. some futile nonsense. Paul illustrates this with idolatry. Can you imagine anyone irrational enough to believe something they made out of wood, stone, feathers, clay or whatever, somehow has mystical power? Isaiah wrote that man cuts down a tree, *and half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast...he also warms himself...But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships...* (Isaiah 44:16-17). Idolatry is as irrational as believing the earth is flat, or that we learn God's directives through mysticism, or that we evolved from a prehistoric soup of chemicals, or that truth is relative.
- In 1 Timothy 1, Paul attributed *strange doctrines, myths and genealogies* to men making speculations. Instead of using speculations, Paul said we should be *furthering the administration of God which is by faith*. Biblically, faith is a decision to trust a rational, logical, intelligent understanding of the evidence God has presented. Futile speculations ignore all that and see faith as a blind leap into ideas that have no basis in reality. That would include blind faith in ideas like a flat-earth mysticism, evolution, cults, world religions, and relative truth.

## What to Do About People Believing in Futile Speculations

2 Samuel 8:15 ...*David administered justice and righteousness for all his people.*

1. **Identify** futile speculations as ideas that have no basis in real world observations. Futile speculations will be ideas that cannot be repeatedly observed and examined with the laws of logic.
2. **Do not try to convince** or convert people who teach futile speculations. In Romans 1:21-25, Paul writes about identifying them and explaining them, not trying to convince or convert them.
3. **Avoid** people who believe in futile speculations, in terms of fellowship, if they insist on talking about the futile speculations. The Apostle John said, *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting* (2 John 10).
4. **Judge** futile speculations in the sense of making a rational case against them, if they are influencing those for whom you have responsibility (1 Peter 5:1-3). Remember, *both to exhort* [παρακαλέω (*parakaleo*) to exhort, encourage, or console] *in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict* (Titus 1:9) means to strengthen and encourage Christians. It does not mean to convert futile speculators.
5. **Ask yourself, "Am I doing what they are doing?"** It is clear that human nature, specifically the sin nature, has a tendency to pervert our minds into understanding irrational nonsense to be true. Since we all have a sin nature, we must continually ask ourselves if we are believing in any futile speculations.

## Conclusion

Biblical Christianity is the only religion that defines faith as a rational, logical, intellectual decision to trust real observations. The Bible describes real historical events that happened in real geographical places in the real world. You can go to Israel and see them. This is not Zeus and Aphrodite on Mount Olympus or Mohammed riding a magic horse to "various heavens." There is no room in Biblical Christianity for futile speculations.

But where do they come from? We have observed two connected things about the source of futile speculations. (1) Paul said they come from our *lust*, meaning wrong desires. (2) We have established that these lustful speculations come from our sin nature. One thing Christians and non-Christians have in common is a sin nature. All the futile speculations mentioned above, and all the others we make every day, come from our sin nature attacking true faith, a decision to trust reason applied to reality. We all have a (sinful) tendency to believe things that have no rational basis in reality.

So, don't do that.