

Flat-Earthers: A Lesson in How We Deceive Ourselves

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | May 20, 2020



Today, here in 2020, there are people who believe that the earth is flat.

When I first came across this modern movement, I thought it was a joke. Surely, in the modern age of science, technology, satellites, space flights, and telescopes, no one would believe the earth is flat. Sadly, some do.

But I believe that examining this belief system can teach us something about the incredible capacity of the human mind to deny evidence and distort facts in order to cling to a false belief. So let's examine the flat-earth's belief system and identify the various mental tricks employed to deny reality - and how these same methods are used by billions of people around the world to cling to other false belief systems.

From the [flat-earthers website](#), here are some of their key beliefs and explanations:

- Their beliefs are not a joke. They want to be taken seriously.
- Their beliefs are based primarily upon what a person can experience with their own unenhanced

senses – e.g., no telescopes – just standing in a place on the earth and looking around. Thus, they restrict the evidence on which they base their belief to what they can experience directly.

- This process is known as selection bias – limiting oneself to a restricted evidence base in order to minimize or eliminate data, facts, and evidence that would refute or contradict the core belief. This is also seen in:
 - Penal-legal theologians use the concept of *sola Scriptura* to enact this fallacy. They restrict the evidence they are willing to accept by rejecting science, nature, and real-life experiences – thus, they cling to a false view of God’s character and government.
 - Evolutionists who reject the Bible and restrict their evidence pool to only that which they can currently measure or test. Thus, they cling to a false view of reality.
- While the Flat Earth Society is not tied to a religion, many of its Christian adherents take a literal view of Scripture.
 - This is literalism, concrete thinking, refusing to abstract, and refusing to understand symbols, metaphor, parables, figures of speech, etc.
 - Many Christians do this with a variety of beliefs: “The Bible said it, I believe it.” Examples include taking the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as literal. Or, reading statements of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart as literal – that is, God making Pharaoh into a rebel even though Pharaoh really wanted to repent and love God. Or, predestination, in which God chooses who is saved and lost.
- They deny that humans have been to space and claim the various national space agencies have all faked spaceflight videos to create complex organizations from which to embezzle money.
 - This is the denial of reality to maintain a firmly held belief and is a classic primitive defense mechanism, one often seen in addicts when they deny that they have a problem or claims they can handle it. It is also seen in abusive relationships in which the victim makes excuses for the abuser, denying the problem is a lack of love in the abuser; the abuser also denies the problem is in their own heart/mind and instead blames the victim.
 - Religious groups that deny evidence exposing sacred beliefs as false, most important, the false belief that God’s law works like human law – imposed rules requiring God to punish.
 - Scientists do this when they deny evidence that refutes their no intelligent designer theories – such as the genetic evidence that refutes Darwin’s theory of mutation over millions of years, or how no naturalistic theory exists to explain from where the coded information found in our DNA came – which is required for all life.
- They argue that photographic and video evidence from weather balloons, aircraft, and satellites can be easily doctored or altered. Therefore, such evidence is not to be accepted as reliable.
 - This is taking a fact and applying it falsely: take a truth – photographic evidence *can* be altered – and applying that fact to the photos in question without actually demonstrating that the photos or videos in question have been doctored. Thus, any evidence that refutes the position can be rejected out of hand because “photos *can* be altered.”
 - Christians do this in a variety of ways. Fact: We are to live by having faith in God. False application: Having faith means we don’t ask questions and don’t require evidence; we just believe.
 - Scientists do this via multiple false assumptions. Fact: Carbon-14 decays at a fixed rate. False application: Accurate carbon dating can be obtained by measuring carbon-14 levels – but this is predicated upon an unprovable assumption that carbon-14 in the atmosphere was the same thousands of years ago as it is today.

- They believe that the earth is a flat disc with the arctic circle at the center and that the sun revolves around the earth. Around the edges of the disc is an ice wall that holds the oceans in. Government agencies have people at the ice wall to prevent anyone from climbing over and discovering the edge of the world.
- They deny that the law of gravity exists and instead believe that what we call gravity is actually centrifugal forces from the earth constantly accelerating.
 - The result of employing these multiple mental gymnastics to deny and distort reality (selection bias, literalism, denial, distortion, false application of facts) is the unavoidable formation of beliefs that are out of harmony with reality; i.e. false beliefs and lies.
 - Christianity has many of these. God is the source of pain and suffering under the guise of “justice.” Human beings have immortal souls. God tortures humans in hell for all eternity. God killed Jesus on the cross in order to satisfy His wrath. God requires the blood of a human sacrifice in order to forgive us.
 - Science also has many of these. There is no God. Life came from non-living matter. Complexity and organization occur spontaneously, on their own, without any intelligent input.
- When asked what about the other planets we can see that are spheres and not round discs – their answer is that they are not earth, and a flat earth doesn’t require the other planets to be flat.
 - Christians do this when questions or evidence doesn’t fit their model and they respond with: God’s ways are not our ways; we just take that on faith and don’t require it to make sense.

The Bible teaches how reality works – there is truth, and there are lies. Each of us is to be fully persuaded in our own minds (Romans 14:5). If we choose to reject the truth, the only thing left for the mind to rest upon is a lie, and with each subsequent rejection of truth, we go further and further from reality until we eventually become delusional. This is what the Bible teaches in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11:

The rise of the deviant one will be accompanied by manifestation of Satan’s methods and power, counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and anything else that deceives and darkens the minds of those who are dying—those who did not develop minds that love the truth, and thereby did not partake of the Remedy. Because they reject the truth, God leaves them to their delusional world built on lies (*The Remedy*).

This is true regarding any subject matter. If on a clear day we look at the sky and tell someone that the sky is blue, using a meter that gives the exact wavelength of light being refracted, and then present that evidence to the person, they still have to choose to believe it or reject it. If they reject it, what is all that is left for their mind to rest upon? It doesn’t matter whether they choose red, pink, brown, or green – if it isn’t blue, it is a lie.

This is what happens to many people; they have never trained their minds to think through evidence or they restrict the evidences they are willing to include in the formation of their beliefs.

Our goal as human beings, created in the image of God, is to mature, develop, grow up, and become *thinkers*, capable of evaluating facts and evidences and coming to healthy conclusions. Thus, Hebrews tells us that the mature are those who have developed by practice the ability to discern right from

wrong (5:14).

We at Come and Reason Ministries want people to become thinkers, to develop their God-given abilities to the highest capacity possible – and this requires that they exercise those faculties in godly ways. Thus, we must be lovers of the truth and resist the temptation to deny, distort, and restrict the evidences available to us.

When we do choose to value the evidence – to think, to reason – we must recognize that some evidence has more value than other evidence. Foundational to understanding reality is to identify God's design laws, the laws upon which reality is built to operate. These are constants, they never change and, therefore, become reliable safeguards to forming our beliefs. In other words, we require our beliefs to harmonize with God's design laws, not violate them.

So think, reason, examine the evidence, be a lover of the truth, and grow daily in the truth, because God is the source of all truth – and as we grow in truth, we grow ever closer to our incredible Creator God of love.
