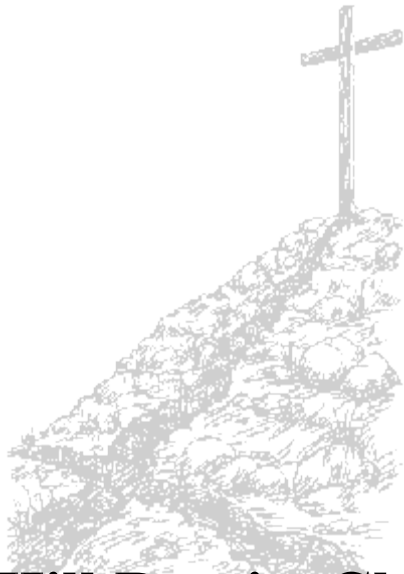


To The Unknown God

Acts 17:22-31



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FOCAL Acts 17:22-31 (KJV) "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. {23} For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. {24} God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; {25} Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; {26} And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; {27} That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: {28} For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. {29} Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. {30} And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: {31} Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

We live in a society where absolutes are quickly ceasing to be. Truth is relative, based on what best satisfies my

own whims. We live in a society much like the one that Paul approached and preached to at Mars' Hill, a society that has erected a temple and called it "To The Unknown God" because God is - in their minds - out there somewhere. But is that true?

Our God Is Bigger Than A Building

FOCAL Acts 17:22-24 (KJV) "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. {23} For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. {24} God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands"

The Unknown God is easy to worship, for the Unknown God is One who stays in His temple until I need Him. He is a little god, with a little "g", a god that only exists when I call him into being. I can live my life apart from the unknown God until such time as I need Him. But once I need Him I can go to the Temple and offer something to Him that He wants ... and He'll take care of my needs.

This type of God is a fantasy God, and is certainly not the God of The Bible. Look at verse 24:

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands"

What the Apostle is saying is that God made *everything*: everything *in* this world and everything *around* this

world ... and that He has no need to dwell in a Temple made with our mere mortal hands. God is not tied to the Church, nor to the Temple, nor to any building. God is *everywhere* you are, and hears *everything* you say - whether you say in the dark locked away in your bedrooms at night, or say it in the next room.

King David said of God:

Psalms 139:2-14 (NET Bible) "You know when I sit down and when I get up; even from far away you understand my motives. You carefully observe me when I travel or when I lie down to rest; you are aware of everything I do. Certainly my tongue does not frame a word without you, O Lord, being thoroughly aware of it. You squeeze me in from behind and in front; you place your hand on me. Your knowledge is beyond my comprehension; it is so far beyond me, I am unable to fathom it. Where can I go to escape your spirit? Where can I flee to escape your presence? If I were to ascend to heaven, you would be there. If I were to sprawl out in Sheol, there you would be. If I were to fly away on the wings of the dawn, and settle down on the other side of the sea, even there your hand would guide me, your right hand would grab hold of me. If I were to say, "Certainly the darkness will cover me, and the light will turn to night all around me," even the darkness is not too dark for you to see, and the night is as bright as day; darkness and light are the same to you. Certainly you made my mind and heart; you wove me together in my mother's womb. I will give you thanks because your deeds are awesome and amazing."

The Bible teaches us that the True God is *always there* no matter where I go. He is not like a regular person, like

a wife or a sister, a mother or a father, that you can leave in one room while you go to another. The theological word for God's *always being there* is "omnipresence". How thoroughly is God there? Paul said:

FOCAL Acts 17:28 (KJV) "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

"In Him we live, and move, and have our being". God is all around us. When we come to Church, God is here. But when we go home, God is there, too. Some have believed that they can live a good life at Church and live any way they want to at home, and in so doing everything will be fine. But God is everywhere! God told the Prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 23:23-24 (KJV) "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? {24} Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD."

God is everywhere, watching, waiting. He was here this morning when you came to Church, but He was also at home with you as you got ready for Church. God is omnipresent, and intensely personal ... and I praise Him for that.

In my own human mind there are times when I forget the omnipresence of God. Though we know the Scripture teaches this, in our human experience we have never come up against such a thing. Truths such as this can only be spiritually discerned, but the mind cannot quite grasp its every nuance.

Listen Beloved, if God is everywhere then *I cannot hide*

sin from Him. When I sin He sees me, and knows what I have done. When I do evil with my lips, or even think evil in my heart, God knows all about it. He understands that which motivates me, and knows whether what I am doing is out of a pure heart or out of a heart of malice. My God sees through me as if I were made of glass, and every action I perform and claim to be for Him *should certainly be for Him*, else I should not do it at all. When I am in the wrong or doing wrong, God being there at all times is certainly disquieting. My heart had best be an one with my Lord, insofar as I can be at one with Him, for the God Who is - Who is known as the Great I Am - can not be fooled. He is everywhere. King David thought that he was doing something that God couldn't see when he took Bathsheba to be his wife and murdered her husband Uriah. Yet shortly after this God came to David through Nathan the Prophet, exposing his evil. You cannot hide your estate from God, for He sees your sin and mine.

God not only sees my sin, but He also sees my suffering. Since He is everywhere then there is never a time when I am without His presence. The Lord tells us:

Hebrews 13:5-6 (NASB) "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," {6} so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME?""

My God is with me in the bright times, but He is also with me in the dark times. He sees my suffering, and stands ready to help me through whatever I may encounter. Before our Lord Jesus ascended to Heaven He gave us a Great Commission, and at the end of that

Commission He said:

Matthew 28:20 (KJV) "... lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Quite literally this means "I am with you at all times". If you have come to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you know that He is with you **always** or **every single day**. There is never a time when Jesus doesn't stand with the believer. What a great comfort this is as we mortals walk through this life. Our God is alive, in us, and with us!

Our God Is Bigger Than Our Needs

FOCAL Acts 17:24-25 (KJV) "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; {25} Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things"

The God Who is everywhere makes all things - and since He can create anything He wants with the mere command of His mouth, He doesn't *need* anything that I have. The Apostle said "Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing". God needs nothing, though He is the Great Source of all things. God is bigger than my needs, no matter what they may be. Listen to what God says:

Psalms 50:10-12 (KJV) "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. {11} I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. {12} If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof."

God is bigger than my physical needs. God is not only *everywhere*, but He is also *all sufficient*. He owns everything though, because of His great love, He allows us to *rent* certain things in this lifetime. God is everywhere, He is intensely personal, and He is *sufficient*. He owns it all and He controls it all.

But these truths give me *great comfort*, for if God is everywhere, intensely personal, and needing nothing from me, then it is in my best interest to come to know this God. I want to love such as God is! Why? Because everything God is, I am not. I am weak, but God is strong. I cannot be everywhere, nor can I see what tomorrow will bring. But God sees it all, and controls it all - so I certainly want to be where God wants me to be. I want to walk where God tells me to walk, for He knows what's best for my life. I want to stay in step with His Spirit, not because He needs me to be in step with Him, but because *it is for my own best interest to do so*.

But God is also bigger than my spiritual needs. The Bible tells us that:

Colossians 1:13-17 (KJV) "[God] hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: {14} In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: {15} Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: {16} For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: {17} And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Jesus Christ created all things - even our very salvation. Prior to that Hill we call Calvary Jesus made all things. **"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him"**. Everything was made by Jesus for His own pleasure. The Bible even tells us that **"by him all things consist"**¹ or *hold together*. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, *holds all things together*. Our Lord keeps the planets in their proper rotation, holds this old earth together, binds all things together so that we who are mortal can continue to live. Jesus Christ also holds together a life, a marriage, and a family. He is the Source of stability and peace, the True God Who is ever present whether we perceive Him or not.

The God of the Bible, our Jesus, does not need us but we certainly need Him. We need Him at the point of salvation, for our Scripture says **"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"**. If God owns it all, then what can I pay Him for my salvation? What do you give the God Who has it all? You give Him your trust, your obedience, your love. You rely on Him for salvation, for the payment price, His own Blood. I need not worry about my soul if I have entrusted it to His care, for He is bigger than any need that I have. He is big enough to keep me saved!

Our Big God Wants Our Big Commitment To Him

FOCAL Acts 17:29 (KJV) **"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."**

¹ Perfect Active Indicative sunistao {pronounced soon-is-tah'-o}, to hold together

Our God wants us to perceive Him as *more than mere man*, but to understand that He is big, He is everywhere, and that He wants us to honor Him in all that we say and do. If you are serving a *little god* then you are acting one way at Church and another way in the workplace. The Bible says:

Proverbs 11:1 {NET Bible} "The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but a perfect weight is his delight."

God sees us at work just as clearly as He sees us in Church, and He wants us to honor Him no matter where we walk. The scales we use in business should honor God, because God is watching me while I work for my employer. We should be the *same at work* as we are *at Church* - our religion must recognize that God is always there in the workplace, just as He is always here at Church.

Proverbs 11:20 {NET Bible} "The Lord abhors those who are perverse in heart, but those who are blameless in their ways are his delight."

It is certain that we are all sinners by nature - but it is also certain that God looks at our hearts. God wants His children to serve Him with a willing and loving heart, following Jesus with pure motivation. God loves it when His people serve Him with a clear heart, willing to do whatever He asks.

Proverbs 12:22 {NET Bible} "The Lord abhors a person who lies, but those who deal truthfully are his delight."

God delights in the person who recognizes that He is there at all times, even when he's speaking - and delights

in the person that honors Him with his voice. The person who *walks worthy and talks worthy* blesses God, for God watches you at all times, and unworthy behavior hurts the Lord. The Apostle wrote:

Ephesians 4:1-3 (KJV) "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, {2} With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; {3} Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The God Who is everywhere is also the God Who is known by His Love, and it delights Him when His people walk together in love with Him and with one another. The family that we're a small part of today will be the same family that will one day meet together in Heaven around the Throne of God. Again we read:

Proverbs 15:8 {NET Bible} "The Lord abhors the sacrifices of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him."

The God Who is everywhere and Who owns everything wants our love, our fellowship, our service. He wants to walk with us in the cool of the evening, as He used to do with Adam prior to the fall. God wants our *prayers and our praise*. Warren Wiersbe said:

"Praise sanctifies our lives at all times. It sanctifies us when we're in the dentist's chair, or when we're standing by an open grave. The Lord Jesus sang before He went to Calvary. "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out (Matthew 26:30). Paul and Silas praised the Lord in prison when their bodies hurt (Acts 16:25). Praise unifies God's people. One thing we can all do together is praise the Lord."

Our God Is Bigger Than Death Itself

FOCAL Acts 17:27-31 (KJV) "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: {28} For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. {29} Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. {30} And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: {31} Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

The Bible teaches us that God is everywhere, that God sees all things, and that God is also on the other side of the veil we call *death*. The Lord has set aside a time where everyone will be judged when we leave this life. By what criteria will we be judged? By God's criteria, for He is the Absolute! The Bible says that God "**now commandeth all men every where to repent**"². That word **repent** means *to change the mind*. God wants us to change our mind insofar as the way we approach Him and live around Him.

It is certain that there is nothing I can do to *make myself righteous* before God, nor is there anything I can do to make myself more acceptable to Him. When I **repent** I turn away from my own means of life and turn toward God's means of life. I trust Jesus Christ for my salvation

² Present Active Infinitive *metanoeo* {pronounced met-an-o-eh'-o}, to change the mind

- after all, God has raised Him from the grave - and strive to walk in ways that are pleasing to my Master.

If I had to go to court for something that I had done, to be judged either innocent or guilty, then I certainly do not want to stand before some *impersonal judge* and hope that He renders a just verdict. If I'm going to go to court to be judged I want to stand before a judge *who is related to me*, even before a parent, a Father. It is much better to be judged by a Father Who loves you, than to be judged by some *unknown person* in black robes. Father's judgment will always be merciful and sweet!

The Bible tells us that a judgment day is coming. We are told:

Romans 14:11-12 (KJV) "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {12} So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

On judgment day I do not want to be standing before "The Unknown God", but I want to be standing before God my Father. Our intensely personal God Who is everywhere loves us so much that the Scripture says:

Galatians 4:4-7 (KJV) "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, {5} To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. {6} And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. {7} Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

What a beautiful truth this is! God came from Heaven

and, taking on human form, He died for me. He *redeemed me* from that slave market of sin, and by His Blood adopted me as His son. Even more beautiful is this: for all who believe God came to *live inside of us* - and every child of God is marked by this indwelling Spirit of God. We are not just servants, but we are sons of God, and heirs of His Kingdom.

So one day when I stand before Him, I will not stand before an *Unknown God*, but I will stand before God my Father. I will not stand before Him as an interloper, nor as an offender, a lawbreaker, but I will stand before Him as *a son*. What a beautiful day that will be! Will you yourselves stand before God as an unknown, or will you stand before Him as Father? He wants you to stand before Him as Father - if you would only repent and trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.