

“Sermon to the Unknown God”  
(Part 3)  
Acts 17:15-34  
(Preached at Trinity, May 23, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We’ve been looking at Paul’s famous sermon on Mars’ Hill. Arriving in Athens he went to the synagogue where he disputed with the Jews but he also went to the market place to preach Christ. There he met a group of philosophers – Epicureans and Stoics.
2. Although they dismissed him as foolish because he believed in the resurrection they were all too curious to hear more of his strange teaching. They brought Paul before the Areopagus. Paul stood and preached the famous discourse known as Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill. Seeing an inscription “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” Paul began to describe this God they claimed to be “unknown.”
  - A. Paul knew human nature. He knew that God clearly revealed Himself to all men. All men had an inner understanding of the Creator, though they suppress Him.
  - B. As we’ve seen Paul met them where they were. With the Jews he opened the Scriptures and taught Christ from the Old Testament. The philosophers, however, were pagans who had no understanding of the Scriptures. Paul took them back to the beginning – He introduced them to their Creator.  
**Acts 17:23** – “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”
3. As we’ve seen, in this sermon Paul gives five clear points.
  - A. God is the Creator of all things
  - B. God is infinitely greater than His creation
  - C. God is the Sustainer of all things
  - D. God is the Ordainer of all things
  - E. We should seek Him and repent of our sins
4. Last time we looked at the first point. God is the Creator of all things  
**Acts 17:24** – “God that made the world and all things therein”
  - A. The Gospel begins with God as Creator
    1. Paul describes the universal dominion of God  
**Acts 17:24** – “he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;”
    2. As Creator God owns all things
    3. As Creator He has the rule over all things
    4. As Creator God had the right to make demands of man  
“thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

5. As Creator God has the right to expect praise and worship from all creation
- B. This Creator God has condescended to allow Himself to be known of men – to be worshipped by men.  
**Acts 17:27** – “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:”
- C. God is near. We should seek Him. Those who seek Him will find Him.  
**Matthew 7:7-8** – “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: <sup>8</sup> For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”
- D. The problem with these pagan philosophers is the problem of all men. They will not have God. Paul focuses on their chief sin. They had broken the First Commandment.  
Paul didn't have to preach of how wickedly they had disobeyed the Law of God, though he could have. He didn't have to speak of their gross immorality, though he could have. They were guilty of breaking the first commandment.
5. Let's continue looking at Paul's great sermon.
- I. God is the Creator but God is infinitely greater than His creation  
**Acts 17:24-25** – “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; <sup>25</sup> Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing”  
**Acts 17:29** – “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.”
- A. God is not of this world
1. Although He has condescended that He might be known of us He is infinitely higher than we are.
    - a. This must never be forgotten. Even Christians who know Him as Father must never forget His infinite majesty.
    - b. Jesus taught this in the Lord's Prayer,  
“Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.”
  2. Although God is active in the care and rule of this world He is completely other than this world – He is holy
    - a. The Hebrew word for holy is קֹדֶשׁ (qodesh)  
1) apartness, separateness, apartness, sacredness
    - b. The Hebrew verb means the same thing. The KJV often translates it “Hallowed.”  
**Exodus 20:11** – “For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”
  3. God has infinite worth, infinite excellence. He is infinitely greater than His creation.

- B. All of the nations of the earth are insignificant compared to God – They are all irrelevant. Isaiah described this the best.  
**Isaiah 40:15** – “Behold, the nations *are* as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.”
1. As a drop from a bucket – insignificant
  2. As dust on a scale – irrelevant
  3. Whole continents are as a speck as viewed by God  
 For the phrase “very little thing” Isaiah uses the word דַּק {dak} which describes something of the smallest size – should God desire, He could lift them as though they were a grain of dust
  4. They are less than nothing  
**Isaiah 40:17** – “All nations before him *are* as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.”
- C. God is infinitely great
1. The problem with men is they fail to see the greatness of God
  2. We vainly see ourselves as great  
 God has no rivals  
**Daniel 4:35** – “And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”
  3. God cannot be compared with anything in this world – He is infinitely great.
- III. God is the Sustainer of all things  
**Acts 17:25** – “Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;”
- A. Not only is God Creator – He also sustains all life
1. Remember the Epicureans and Stoics denied the existence of a God that was active in the affairs of men
  2. Paul says God gives life and breath – The Greek form is a present participle which show an ongoing action. He gives and keeps on giving life. God is the sustainer of life.  
 If He quit sustaining you for a second you would perish.
  3. “and all things” – God sustains all things
- B. In Colossians 1 Paul stresses the ongoing work of God in Christ  
**Colossians 1:16-17** – “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: <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”
1. The word for “consist” literally means “to hold together.”
  2. God is very active in His world holding all things together. If He ceased to hold all things together all things would come apart

- C. Few understand just how fragile life upon the earth is
1. Few understand our absolute dependence upon God's sustaining grace
    - a. Our earth has to maintain a perfect rotation. The angle of tilt has to be right. It has to keep a perfect distance from the sun. How foolish to think that it has managed to maintain this perfect action independently for thousands of years.
    - b. A perfect balance of gasses must be maintained in our atmosphere – oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide.
    - c. The water cycle of evaporation and precipitation must be in perfect balance.  
About 10% of the earth's fresh water is held in the atmosphere  
If the polar ice cap melted the seas would rise by 260 feet
    - d. Harvests must consistently brought in year after year. If we missed one harvest there would be shortages. If we missed two we would have a severe need – prices would skyrocket. If we missed the third harvest we would be in serious need and hunger would ensue.
  2. If God suspends His divine favor in sustaining us, we will all die
  3. In the Gospel we tell sinners that they owe their very existence to God  
They are breathing because God is sustaining them

IV. God is the Ordainer of all things

**Acts 17:26** – “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;”

- A. God is not only the Creator and Sustainer of all things, He orders the affairs of men and all creation.
1. God determines our life, when we live, where we live
    - a. God moved me across the nation so I could meet my wife, so I could father my children.
    - b. God sustained me though accident and infection – I couldn't perish because God had not ordained it.
    - c. Why do we worry – God is in control!  
**Matthew 6:25** – “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”
  2. God is the Ruler of this world – nothing is outside His control
- B. His decrees are not sudden decisions but they are eternal councils
1. They are based upon infinite wisdom
  2. God has appointed and determined all things
  3. Our times are in God's hand – He determines the length of our lives  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1-2** – “To every *thing* there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: <sup>2</sup> A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted;”
- C. Paul summarizes it:
- Acts 17:28** – “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.”
1. We owe all things to God
  2. He is worthy of all praise, honor, and obedience

**Conclusion:**

1. This is the message we bring. God is our Creator and demands praise, worship, and obedience from all men.
2. He is ever present to receive those who turn to Him in worship and submission.  
**Acts 17:27** – “though he be not far from every one of us:”
3. Next time we will examine Paul’s final point—the end of the Gospel. God demands all men to repent and turn to Him in faith.