

“KNOWING THE UNKNOWN GOD”

Acts 17:22-31

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

The Athenians were ready to hear **something new** from Paul—see v. 21. Many thought him to be a worthless “seed picker” (v. 18).

Now Paul stands before the ancient and revered Areopagus—the elite governing body responsible for the teachers and philosophers permitted to ply their trade in Athens. What would Paul say? He had been saying some strange things about some apparently strange gods called “Jesus and the resurrection” (v. 18).

What they heard was both surprising and shocking! First, Paul immediately disarmed them by telling them that he was going to explain to them what they already worshiped in ignorance: “The unknown God.” *Far from being the originator of some strange new and prohibited religion, he was going to tell them about an ancient religion that they ignorantly provided for in their worship.*

He further disarmed them by being familiar with their literature and poets and prophets and philosophers. **His speech is a masterful exposition of how to preach to a cultured and educated crowd without compromising the Gospel in any way.**

If you think that you can know God by natural means and that you can worship Him in your own way, you are sadly deluded and will end up being lost forever.

YOU MUST COME TO KNOW GOD AND THAT HE HAS PROVIDED FOR YOUR SALVATION.

- I. CONDITION OF THE WORSHIPPERS (22-23)
 - A. They are Religious (22)

Is this not true of all peoples around the world?
What proof has he seen for this statement? While examining the objects of their religious devotion he has seen a special altar.
 - B. They are Ignorant (23)—An altar to an **Unknown God** (explain)
 - Thus they admit that despite all of the religious trappings of their city, and the many thousands of statues, altars, and images, gods and goddesses, they could still be missing something—but **what or Who it is they do not know!**
 - Back in v. 18 they had called Paul a “proclaimer”; **now he will Proclaim to them what they were worshiping in ignorance.**
 - C. They are Lost and Helpless (27)
 1. The likelihood of man finding God through his own seeking is slim—they are like **blind men groping in the dark trying to find a wall etc.**
 2. Is there a slim chance that they can find Him? **Not in their lost and blinded condition**
 - D. They are Perverted in their thinking and practices (29)
 1. They have made countless images of their gods in their own likeness.

2. They have used material elements for their religious trappings—gold, silver, stone—
how can such represent the Divine Nature?
 3. Such images are made by their human skill.
 4. Such images are designed according to their own thoughts.
- E. They are Utterly Dependent upon the God who made them and all things—but they do not know it! (28a): *In Him we live and Move and Have our Being—our very existence!* And, as v. 25 b says: **He gives us life, and breath, and all things.**

Now that Paul has shown us the condition of the worshippers [our condition], he will show us the Character of the True God that man attempts to worship in his ignorance.

II. THE CHARACTER OF GOD

- A. He is the Creator (24, 26a, 28b, 29a)
- He made the “World” and “all things in it.” (24).
 - He made the first man—Adam (v. 26; Gen. 1-2).
 - “We are His offspring” (v. 28b; 29a—by creation, not to be confused with spiritual adoption or the new birth. The Greek poet Paul quotes is Aratus.
 - Thus, we are made like Him—in His image. It is not the other way around!
 - **Don’t you see the danger of evolutionary teaching? The Athenians believed in the eternity of matter; there was never a time when it did not exist.**
 - Paul begins with the doctrine of Creation! So should we.
- B. He is Lord (24)—OF Heaven **and of Earth!**
1. Therefore, we cannot confine Him to temples made with human hands—See Isaiah 66:1-2; 1 Kings 8:27.
 2. Therefore, He is not served by human hands—25a—as though He needs something that we can give Him.
 3. He does not need our sacrifices, our food, or our sweet smelling incense.
 4. **We need Him; He does not need us.**
- C. He is Our Sustainer (25b, 28a)
- D. He Controls Providence—all that happens in this World (26).
1. The Unity of the human race from Adam.
God determined beforehand their appointed times.
 2. God determined their set boundaries.
 3. Of course, all this does not limit man’s will and personal responsibility, nor excuse him for aggressions and injustices.
 4. The point is that **History is “His Story.”**
- E. He is Omnipresent (27b)—“He is not far from each one of us.”
God is immanent but not in the sense of pantheism.

Thus, knowing the Condition of the Worshipper and the Character of God ought to result in the Contrition of the Worshipper.

III. THE CONTRITION OF THE WORSHIPPER

- A. He must Seek God on His Terms and through His enablement (27)

- God has had a gracious purpose for His providential control of everything (26); he wants man to seek Him **from his heart sincerely and in His way**—see Isaiah 66:2 and 57:15.
- B. He must Repent (30)
1. God has “overlooked” [not “winked at”] man’s past waywardness, not giving out the full penalty, realizing man’s weakness and ignorance.
 2. He no longer can give men “slack”—the time of the revelation of His Son has come—now “all men everywhere” must repent.
 3. This is a **command** from God—this is His will.
 4. Man is not good enough to make it on his own; he cannot go his own way.
- C. He Must Face Judgment (31).
1. The day is fixed—we have no choice in the matter.
 2. The standard of judgment is righteous.
 3. The entire world will be judged.
 4. THE **MAN**—Son of Man will be the judge—He is the mediator and the provision for man’s salvation. He has been appointed.
 5. This man has been **approved** and **attested** (Greek word for faith) by God **raising Him from the dead**.
 6. THE RESURRECTION IS BOTH THE PROVISION FOR OUR SALVATION, AND THE BASIS FOR OUR JUDGMENT (See John 3:16-18).

CONCLUSION

You can know the Unknown God.

Man through his own efforts has proven ignorant and foolish.

God Himself has declared to us the way to be saved.

This God is the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible—the Creator, Lord, Sustainer, Provider, Omnipresent One. He is the God we need to know.

We can only know Him through His Son—whom He has appointed to be our Judge.

Repent! Seek the Lord on His terms. He is here and will save you and guide you and take you through the future judgment.

If you know Him, proclaim Him to others.