

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Getting to Know the Unknown God, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 17:22-24

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Our study this morning takes us to the seventeenth chapter of the book of Acts. And the title of the message is "Getting to Know the Unknown God". "Getting to Know the Unknown God". We always look at the Word of God here at Grace Church because this is the authoritative voice of divine Revelation. One of our elders was sharing in our prayer meeting in early hour this morning that he had a prayer answered because he knew of a pastor he'd been praying for who is very liberal and all of that and he said that he got word that this pastor had stood up before his congregation and said that he was being convinced that the Bible was authoritative. We believe that it is authoritative. We believe that it was written by God Himself. And it reveals His truth. And so we without any hesitation or without any defense always open the Bible when we begin to talk or when we begin to study.

We come to the seventeenth chapter in this most marvelous record of the history of the early Church known as the book of Acts. Paul is on his second missionary journey. He has been hassled all the way because Satan always resists what God is doing. He founded churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, which are all cities in the area known as Greece. He has been chased out of every one of them. He has left Luke, Silas and Timothy behind to care for those churches and he stands alone, verse sixteen, in the city of Athens. And this is maybe the low point for him. He waits there until Silas and Timothy can join him. He is lonely and he is alone. But it is in that situation that God uses him to give one of the most important messages he ever spoke. And that is the message recorded in verses twenty-two through thirty--one; his sermon to the Areopagus Court. And it is a sermon based on "getting to know the unknown God".

On January 7, 1855, Charles Hayden Spurgeon addressed his congregation at New Park Street Chapel with these words: "Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea. Be lost in His immensity and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial as the devote musing upon God. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning."

And I want to steal his introduction and invite you to the same study. I want to present to you this morning God. I've told you before that I think Christianity somehow has drifted away from an intense understanding of God. We have what we know as "Jesus Movements". And I am definitely pro-Jesus,

believe me, but I often notice that "Jesus move-ments" end up in a sort of sentimental humanism. And then we have "Holy Spirit Movements", and I am pro-Holy Spirit, but the "Holy Spirit Movement" usually ends up in emotionalism. It's interesting to me that the Holy Spirit would never start a "Holy Spirit Movement" for His work is to point to Christ. And Jesus would not Himself start a "Jesus Movement" for He spoke only those things which were spoken to Him by Whom? By the Father. And Jesus came to introduce us to God. And I really feel what the Church desperately needs today is to get its perspective on God.

And so today we have a message about God. How you can know God who is "knowable". And I really believe, people, that the knowledge of God is the key to everything. For example, what were you made for? You were made for one thing. That you might know God. That you might know God. God wanted creatures who would acknowledge Him. And so He made you to know Him and give Him glory. If you don't know Him then you do not exist as you were designed to exist. And rather than being in the knowledge of God and reflecting glory to God, you are a blemish on His glory. For example, a father who has an unruly son finds that that son diminishes his own glory. We see a father and we see an unruly son and automatically we think something's wrong with the father. And God created men to give Him glory. And we look around the world and we see sinful men. We see men who refuse to give Him glory. Men in rebellion. And God does not like that because that diminishes in our eyes the glory of God.

God desires glory from every creature and ultimately removes from His presence those that don't give Him glory. And so men were made to know God. And knowing Him to give Him glory. What then should be the aim of life, of any man's life? To know God. And do you know who allows us to know God? Jesus Christ. Do you it, I don't think that you've ever thought about it this way probably, but let me give you a new thought. Since we're in Athens and they like new things. Verse twenty-one.

Do you know what eternal life is? Eternal life is not a quantity of life. We always think of eternal life as the concept of going-on-forever kind of life. No. Eternal life is not a length of life. Eternal life is a kind of life. God wants to save us and give us eternal life. Do you know what that means? Listen to John 17:3 and I'll define it. Listen. "And this is life eternal." What is? Watch. "That they might know Thee, the only true God." Do you know what eternal life is? It is not a length of life. It is the kind of life that knows God. Did you get that? And so if I know God now, what kind of life do I have? Eternal life. Eternal life isn't a time thing at all. Eternal life is the knowledge of God. It is the kind of living that is plugged into the eternal. Do you see? And so the very thing for which Jesus came was to give us eternal life. And eternal life is not living forever primarily. Eternal life is knowing God--that just happens to go forever.

So the reason men were made was to know God. The reason Jesus died was to give you the knowledge of God that you lost in sin. Do you remember when Adam was created he knew God, didn't he? Walked and talked with God in the cool of day in the garden. He knew Him immediately

when he sinned. He was blinded to God. Cut off from God's presence. And that presence is only restored in Christ, Who said "I am the way", and what was the second thing? "The Truth." He meant on the truth about God. I'll plug you back into the eternal. Being a Christian is this. Being a Christian is being one who knows God. You know, you hear people talk about knowing famous people, you know. Somebody said to me that other day, asked me if I knew Billy Graham. And then, "Have you ever met Billy Graham?" And I said, "No." And he looked kind of surprised. "You haven't." I said, "No, but I know God." You know. Have you ever thought about how exciting that is? I mean, I know the God of the universe. More than that, He never leaves me. He is with me all the time. He likes my company. I know God. And that is what I was made to do. To know God. That is why man's original state is restored in Christ, you see? That's eternal life.

Then it seems obvious to me that if I were to ask the question "What is the best thing in life? What brings me the most joy? What brings me the most delight? And what gives me the most contentment?" The answer would be--knowing God. And you know, there are all kinds of people who try to find contentment in everything imaginable. But real contentment comes in knowing God.

Listen to Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 9:23: "Thus saith the Lord, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches.'"

Now I'm telling you if that isn't the characterization of modern day, I don't know what is. What do smart people glory in? Their intelligence. And what do strong people glory in? Their strength. And what do rich people glory in? Their money. And God says don't glory in any of that. Look at verse twenty-four. "But let him that glorieth, glory in this." What? "That he understands and knows Me." Is that something?

I'll tell you, I can't glory in my wisdom. I'm not that smart. And I can't glory in my strength. I'm not that strong. And I can't glory in any kind of human riches but I'll tell you one thing, I'll glory in this--I understand and I know the God of the universe.

If I were to ask the question "what pleases God most", do you know what the answer would be? You know what makes God the most happy? Listen. Hosea 6:6. Listen. "For I desired mercy and not sacrifice." Now watch. "And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." God says, "Your religion doesn't do a thing for Me. I want you to know Me." And what did Paul say in Colossians? "That I may know Him." Listen. As a Christian the pursuit of the knowledge of God is what everything is about. You know, I think of I John chapter 2. You have three levels of spiritual growth. You have a babe. And it says about babies "that they know the Father". You know, they can say "Da da", you see. They're just infants. All they know is that God loves me and I'm His child. You know, and they're just running around sort of saying spiritual googoo's. That's all they know. But then there is a second level of spiritual growth and John calls that young men. "I write unto you young men because you've overcome the wicked one." The second stage of spiritual growth is a victory over Satan in false

doctrine. But I like this one. He says, "I write unto you fathers". A spiritual father simply means a guy who is mature. And he says here is a spiritual father. "Because you have known Him that is from the beginning". You know what maturity is? It's the fullest knowledge of God. "You know Him that is from the beginning." You've got to grasp for the nature of God. The most exciting subject there is the study of God.

Now man's purpose is to know God. What a thought! And God created man initially to know Him, but something entered into man's world and turned out the lights. Now to believe in God. what was it? Sin. And when man was plugged into the knowledge of God and sin came and yanked the cord out of the socket and the light has been out. And Romans 1 describes it. Look at it. Verse 18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Watch. "Who hold the truth in unrighteousness." Isn't it amazing that men have the truth. Everybody does. Every man who ever lived in this world has resident truth about God available to him. Look at verse 19. You say where is it? Well, "because that which may be known of God is manifest" where? "In them." God plants the innate knowledge that He is in men. It is instinctive for men. We find this with children. They don't have to hassle. You don't have to hassle children. I always remember speaking at elementary school one time, in the South, and I gave an invitation. "And how many kids would like to receive Christ?" And every kid in the place stood up. My reaction was "ho--wa wa wa--what's going on here?" You know why? They had no problem believing in God. None at all. That concept is planted in them from the beginning. It's only later on that men begin to toss themselves out of God philosophically. God has put it in them. He showed it to them. Then, another thing, and not only inside but outside. Verse 20. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen." You look around the world and you see the creation, you see the amazing macrocosm, the giant world, and the microcosm, the minute world, and you say "there's got to be a God who made this". So God is knowable, His knowledge is in me, it is around me. Now, if I fail to recognize that, the end of verse 20 says: "So that they are without" what? "Excuse." The knowledge of God is available. Well, what happens? Sin comes in and destroys that possibility. Verse 21. "When they knew God they glorified Him not as God." The first thing that happened is sin. Instead of living up to the light they had, in-stead of acknowledging God they knew to be, they turned on God, became vain in their imaginations, foolish heart was darkened and the lights went out. They thought they were smart, verse 22. But they were stupid. They changed the glory of an incorruptible God, the incorruptible God, into an image. They started worshipping statues and birds and beasts and snakes. And then verse 24, "God also gave them up." God let them go. If that's the way you want to go, God let them go. Now you see, there was the terrible, terrible plight of men. And every man is in the same state.

In Ephesians 2:12 it says that they are without God in the world. And here God revealed Himself in and out and they turned on that knowledge, the lights went out, and men live without God. In I Thessalonians 4:5 it says "the heathen who know not God".

Well, Paul arrives in Athens there in Acts 17 and he is nose to nose with a bunch of heathen who don't know God. You say, what's a heathen? Is that a guy with a loin cloth and a spear and his nose painted? No, a heathen is defined by this. "The heathen who know not God." Anybody who doesn't know God is a heathen. And the Athenians were cultured heathens just like we have today.

Well, Paul arrived in Athens and he was going to wait awhile, but his waiting was like most men's hard labor, you know. He just didn't know the meaning of it. And he hadn't been there very long until he began to be impressed by the city. And last time we saw how Athens impressed Paul. Remember I told you three things. First of all, it stirred him up in the inside in the sense that it aroused his spir-itual interest. He saw the city full of idols, verse 16. And then it stirred him emotional, it provoked him when he saw the glory of God not really going to God. He saw all this glory given to false gods. So the lostness of men worshipping idols and the glory of God moved him. And the third thing, it compelled his service. Verse 17. "There-fore he disputed." Therefore, he preached, he reasoned. So Athens tremendously impressed him. The lostness of its people, the glory of God not going to God, and he began to work. And He began to preach. And then we saw that when he began to preach, he impressed Athens, as he always did. Four ways: contempt, some people mocked; questioning, some people said "hum, this is interesting, let's hear this"; curiosity, some people said "I want to hear more" and they dragged him up to this court; and some people were converted. So there was contempt, questioning, curiosity and conversion. Athens impressed Paul. Paul, in turn, impressed Athens.

Now the thing which really made the big dent in Athens is the sermon that he gave in verses 22 to 31. We skipped over that sermon last time because we wanted to take it as a unit.

Now, he has been taken to this court. In Athens there was a famous court called the Areopagus Court. It was so named because it originally met on a hill called Areopagus. If you were literally to translate Areopagus it comes out the hill of Aries, or if you want Latin, Mars' hill. Mars is the Latin word. But the word Areopagus in verse 19 and the words Mars' Hill in verse 22 are the same Greek word Areopagus. And it's not talking about a place. It's talking about a court. This is the supreme court of Athens. The same court that had tried and condemned Socrates four centuries earlier. And apparently this court stood in review of phil-osophies. This court had a sort of a religious responsi-bility to defend the gods. And so when some new guy came to town with new deal, he had to go before this court so that his particular philosophy could run the test. It wasn't a trial of any kind. It was sort of a review of Paul's new doctrines. So four centuries after Socrates had been con-demned to the same court, Paul goes, and not to defend his own personal philosophy, but to present to them the only God. What a fantastic challenge! In a city where gods were all over the place. Last time I told you that Petronius said "it's easier to find a god in Athens than it is a man." There were gods everywhere! And here he goes to tell them about the only true God.

_ It's an interesting thing, and I think you have to keep it in mind, that no matter how many gods a man has, no matter how much religion he has, if it never gets to the true God then he never knows

satisfaction. You see? So, here in Athens they had thousands upon thousands upon ten thousands of gods and in the mists of all of that they had statues to unknown gods. Why? That shows the ultimate agony of idolatry. You never get to the true God, so you never get satisfied. You see if Augustine was right and man has a god-shaped vacuum that's only satisfied when he knows the true God, then no matter what he sticks in there it's not going to fit until he knows the true God.

And that's the thing about religion. Religion is just a totally unfulfilling thing. Religion is just stacking up no gods, just adding no gods and never really getting to the issue. And so the tragedy of the hopeless, unfulfilled frustration of false religion was absolutely obvious in Athens. Everybody worshipped. And gods had infanimum (?) had nausea coming out of their ears. And nobody's satisfied.

And Paul in his passion for the lost men and the passion for the glory of God speaks out. And if I were to title his sermon, I would title it "Getting to Know the Unknown God". "Getting to Know the Unknown God".

Now in order to know the unknown God, you've got to know three things. Okay? This is for any of you who don't know God. And for us that do know God, this is a good way to share it. Getting to know the unknown God involves three things. Number one, recognizing God is. Number two, recognizing who God is. Number three, recognizing what God is saying. Now do you see the progression there? Ultimately, knowing God means that you believe that there is a God that you understand who He is, and that you understand what He requires. Right? That's the full spectrum. To begin with then, Paul wants them to say that there is a God. And he doesn't have any problem with that because they do acknowledge it. They were supernaturalists. I mean, they had gods everywhere, as I said. But that's where it has to start. There must be the belief that God is. Now look at verse 22. Paul stood in the mists of the Areopagus Court and he said, "Ye men of Athens". That's a kind of classical oratorical greeting. "I perceive that in all things you are 'desa dimoon(?)'", which means in fear of gods. "You are very religious folks". You know, because they were such, you know, so big on religion you're probably saying "Yes, it's true, we are a very, very religious". They were very religious, and perhaps very satisfied with their religiosity. But he said, he was acknowledging you are supernaturalists, for the most part. In the very beginning of knowing God, you've got to be a supernaturalist. Right? You've got to believe God is. Now if you run across somebody who does not believe in God, who says there is no God. A crusty, hard-shelled, impossible, obstinate, dead-set atheist, he's hopeless. How are you going to introduce him a God he doesn't believe in? There's a good thing you can use with atheists. If a guy says he's an atheist, and he doesn't believe there's a God, he'll say I don't, he'll say there is no God. Then, you ask him if he's been everywhere in the universe. And when he says no, if he says yes he's got a different problem and you need to deal with it in a different way, but if he says and if you say have you been everywhere in the universe and he says no, then you say well good then you really can't say there is no God you can only say you don't think there's a God and you're not an atheist, you are an agnostic. And you can tell him that the Latin word for agnostic is *ignoramus*. And after he, after he reacts to that you can go from there. But basically, unless you are dealing with

somebody that is an obstinate atheist, and then you have to go about it maybe in a little different sense, if a guy says yes, I believe God is, that there is a God, that's a beginning, isn't it?

You remember Einstein said that anybody who didn't believe in a cosmic power was a fool. And then he went on to say "but we can never know him". Einstein was right. Anybody who doesn't believe in a cosmic power is a fool. Einstein was wrong. We can know Him. But at least he believed God is and that's the beginning. That's the beginning. There's a sign in Hume Lake, I think, that always strikes me when I go up to that volleyball court right by the lake. The sign says "God is". Have you ever seen that up there? God is. That's a powerful sign, especially up there. When you look around and see what's going on in those mountains and that "God is" and you're hard-pressed not to believe it.

Hebrew 11:6 says this: "Ye that cometh to God must believe" what? "That He is". Nobody's ever going to get to God if he doesn't believe God is. You can't find the road to the place you don't believe exists. It's got to be somewhere before you can go there. Now, let's be honest to say that God is not provable in test tube. I can't say I'll prove God is real to you. I can sure lay up a lot of heavy evidence, but God is not provable in an empirical sense. That's why it says "he that cometh to God must believe that He is." It's a question of faith. John 1:18: "Nobody's ever seen God at any time."

You say, well what about people who are so confirmed they say there is no God. Well, you know, I have a view as to why people are atheists. And maybe you'll find it helpful sometime if you ever encounter one. It's not really my view alone. It's biblical and it's in Psalm 14. And I think it explains why people are, for the most part, or who are atheists, for the most part, why they're atheists. Listen to Psalms 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God". In fact, the "there is" is added. What the fool really says is "no God". That's pretty emphatic. He doesn't even bother to say "there is". "The fool says in his heart no God."

Do you know why he says that? Right in the very same verse it explains it. "They are" what's the next word? "Corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good." Verse three. "They have gone aside. They are filthy. They are workers of iniquity." Verse four. Now listen. Do you know why people buy atheistic philosophy for the most part? Here's why. Because they are sinners. And watch. They want to eliminate the ultimate judgment on such sinfulness, consequently, they eliminate God. It's expedient for them to philosophically get rid of God so that they don't have to live under the guilt and the fear of a coming judgment. In fact, the word fool there is the Hebrew word "naval", and the word literally means vicious wicked. The vicious wicked one says in his heart no God. Why? Because no man could live a vile life and be anyway content in that vileness while believing in a God who was judgmental. So what does he do? He wants to live his sinful life so he just reasons God out to accommodate his sinfulness. This is also in the beginning of Psalms 10:11-13. Now watch. "He hath said in his heart God hath forgotten." Oh, oh, oh, don't you wish. He hides His face. He'll never see what I do. "Arise, Oh Lord, Oh God, lift up Thine hand, forget not the humble." Watch verse 13. "Wherefore doth the wicked despise God?" Why does this vicious wicked fool despise God and deny

God? Why? He hath said in his heart "Thou wilt not require. What does that mean? That You will require punishment for my sins. Most people are atheists because that's the only way they can get off the hook of judgment for a sinful life. And they are not willing to come to God on His terms, so they want to eliminate Him, so they don't have to live in fear of

judgment. And Athens was full of people who were supernaturalists, who believed in God. But it was also full of some people who were atheists, at least practical atheists. The Epicureans, they believed that pleasure was the highest good and they didn't believe necessarily in God. And so here Paul is about to present the true God. "I perceive you are very religious for as I pass by" verse 23 "and beheld your devo-tions, I found an altar with this inscription: "to the un-known god". You've even got a deal to the unknown god. Now doesn't that give you the idea of the frustration of idolatry. They had all these thousands of gods and they still weren't home, so just had one to an unknown god. They figured there's got to be another out there somewhere. And we haven't hit it yet. Now, you know there are reasons to believe that God is. I don't have any problem with that. The only alternative is to believe that He isn't. And can you imagine believing that there is no God. Just think about that. That believing that nothing in this universe came from anything. I can't handle that. People say, "oh, you Christians, you live by faith." Well, you don't believe in God you tell me what you live by. That is faith that is unbelievable. You say, well, why do you believe that there is a God. Well, I'm not going to get into much of this, but let me just give you two simple reasons that the Bible uses. One, is law of cause and effect? I believe there's a God because I see these things and I wonder where they came from. Right? That's obvious. No effect can ever come about without a cause. And you know, you talk to the evolutionist he says, well, once there was a puddle. And inside the puddle was a one celled thing and the one celled thing said let's be two and then they were two and then those two said oh this is terrific let's four. See. And here we are. Now you say, that's fine, that's real good, but where'd the puddle come from. Well, a, vul, vul vul. Where'd the one celled thing come from? Well, I don't. Well, where'd the possibility of the puddle come from? How can you have a puddle in nothing from nothing? And it's hard for us to even conceive of that. It just doesn't make sense.

You know what Hebrews 3:4. What a subtle statement! Hebrews 3:4. I just love it. It says this: "For every house is built by some man." Isn't that terrific? Can you imagine going out and seeing a new home and somebody just says "I want to show you our new house. It's so wonderful. One day we had a lumberyard deliver a whole pile of lumber and we set a stick of dynamite and blew it up and it all landed like this." You see. "And you see the den is right where we wanted it with the fireplace and everything. And the bedrooms are all upstairs and the plumbing was right in the right spot for the kitchen. It was terrific." You'd say the guy's an idiot. Well, you tell me that how somebody can say that's what the whole universe is like. Hebrews 3:4: "For every house is built by some man but he that built all is God." You see the first cause is God. How could you ever have anything without a first cause?

There is another reason the Bible says that it's logical to believe that God is. And that is the law of intelligence or design. I think, the world is so absolutely intricate, and design is so astounding. Listen to Psalms 94:9-10. Absolutely terrific. There's one of the big arguments you have in evolution is how do you ever get as complex a being as a human out of a puddle? How do you get intelligence from non-intelligence? How do you get moral judgment from a non-moral? What's the difference between a horse and a man? Or a monkey and a man? Morality. Moral judgment. Ethical judgment. Wisdom. The thinking processes. How do you get those things? Listen to Psalms 94:9-10. "He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who chastiseth the nations, shall He not corrupt? He who teaches men knowledge, shall He not know?" In other words, intelligence comes from intelligence. One who creates hearing has to hear. One who creates sight has to see. One who makes moral judgments has to be a moral being. All of that can't come out of ignorance and dead matter. There is a tremendous little thing. I want to take a minute to read it to you. It will take a minute. I want to read it to you. It says: "Sceptic". This guy was an agnostic, a skeptic, who didn't believe in God, at least he didn't think there was a God. And he saw the design and creation of the world one day in his life and it shattered him. This is what he wrote. Very prosaic.

"One beautiful evening in May I was reading by the light of a setting sun my very favorite Plato. I was seated on the grass interwoven with golden blooms immediately on the crystal Colorado River of Texas. Dim in the distant West arose with smoky outlines massy and irregular the blue cones of an offshoot of the Rocky Mountains. I was perusing one of the epidemission's most starry dreams. It laid fast hold of my fancy without exciting my faith. I wept to think that it couldn't be true. At length I came to the sentence 'God geometrizes' [in other words, God makes things in order]. 'Vainremoryl, I exclaimed, and I threw the volume at my feet wishing it were true. It fell close by a beautiful little flower that looked fresh and bright as if it had just fallen from the bosom of a rainbow. I broke it from its silvery stem and I began to examine its structure. Its stamens were five in number. Its calics had five parts. Its delicate coral base had five parts expanding like the rays of a Texas star. This combination of five in the very same blossom appeared to me very unusual. I had never thought on such a subject before. The last sentence I had just read in the page of the pupil of Socrates was ringing in my ears 'God geometrizes'. There was the text written long centuries ago and here this little flower in the remote wilder-ness of the West furnished the commentary. There suddenly passed as it were before my eyes a faint flash of light. I felt my heart leap in my bosom. The enema of the universe was opened. Swift as I thought I calculated the chances against the production of those three equations of five in one flower. By any principle devoid of reason, I found they were 125 chances to 1 that it would happen. I extended the calculations to two flowers by squaring the sums mentioned. I extended the calculation to more flowers. The chances amounted to two to the large sum of 15,625 to 1. And then I cast my eyes around the forest. The old woods were literally alive with those golden blooms. I will not attempt to describe my feelings. My soul became a tumult of radiant thoughts. I took up my beloved Plato from the grass where I had tossed him in a fit of despair and again and again I pressed him to my bosom with a clasp as tender as a mother around the neck of her sleeping child. I kissed the book and the blossom alternating. [And then he says.] In my wild

enthusiasm I called to the little birds on the green limbs trilling their cheery farewells to departing day 'Sing on sunny birds. Sing on sweet minstrels. Lo, you and I have a God."

Now that's a skeptic's view, but he's right on. God geometrizes. The key to the universe was unlocked when he saw a flower. There is order in the universe and it speaks of a God.

And so you see God is. And aside from the external world of God's revelation is the fact that man inside has that innate knowledge of God. And the only reason that he would philosophically violate that is to entertain sin without the fear of consequence. And so Paul starts out by saying God is. You've got to believe that God is and you do. They were on the first step already. They were supernaturalists for the most part.

Now, that's only the beginning. There's got to be more than that. And look where he picks up. He says "I saw your altar to the unknown god." It's an interesting story. You know, there were many of those. There were many of those altars. Six hundred years before Paul arrived there, that's a long time, they had a terrible plague. And this is recorded historically. And in that terrible plague people were dying and they didn't know how to stop it. There was a very well-known poet from Crete by the name of Epimenides and he came up with a plan. They were trying to figure out who which god was uptight and how to pacify the gods and get this plague over with. And since they couldn't find out, they figured maybe the gods would draw the attention to themselves if they had a plan. So Epimenides got on the Aeropagus this little hill there where the court met, and he let loose a flock of black and white sheep. And the plan was that apparently, I guess, I'm just assuming this, but apparently, the gods who were uptight would draw the sheep to themselves. And so the plan was the sheep will run around town and wherever they lie down the nearest god that they're to they'll take them and sacrifice them to that god. If they happened to lie down over here next to this god, they'll kill them there. Assuming that those gods would draw the sacrifices to themselves. They had so many gods. So the sheep went all running through the town and, you know, they would lie down and they would take them over and sacrifice them to the proper god. And, you know, there were a bunch of sheep that didn't cooperate at all. And they went and laid down by no gods. So you know what they did? In all the places where the sheep weren't near a particular god, they raised an altar to the unknown god and sacrificed the sheep there. And so historically, all throughout Athens it is very common to see altars to the unknown god. And there you have the ultimate frustration. But it is good from the beginning at least to assume that they did believe God was there. They were supernaturalists. They hadn't narrowed it down to one.

But look how Paul speaks in verse 23. "Now, [he says] I found the altar with this inscription to the unknown god whom therefore ye ignorantly worship him declare I unto you." Oh, that's terrific. Now, you know that unknown god over there you've been ignorantly worshipping, I am going to introduce Him to you. Folks, meet the unknown God. Now, that was powerful. They had been hung up on this unknown god thing for at least six hundred years. Here's the guy with the message. Fantastic!

And that really is important. You say, well, can a man know the unknown God? Is Einstein right? God is there but you'll never know Him. No. I don't think he's right at all. I think you can know God. You say, why? Well, I know Him, but I'm not going to use that as an explanation, because I don't want you to do it on my experience. I want to tell you what the Bible says. Galatians 4:8. "Nevertheless then, when ye knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods." Now, he could have said that to Athens. Right? You didn't know the true God so you'd fiddle around with a bunch of non-gods. "But now after you have known God." Now, you see, Paul says right there you didn't use to know Him but now you know Him. You can know God. You can know God.

In I Chronicles 28:9, it says this and listen, fathers, here's some great advice for your kids. Here's David talking to son Solomon. "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father." Do you know, father, if you want to give your son some advice that's the best you'll ever give him. "Son, know God." "And serve Him with a perfect heart and with willing mind for the Lord searcheth all hearts, under-standeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek Him, He will be found by thee, but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever." David said, "My son, know Him." And if you seek Him, you'll know Him. But if you forsake Him, He'll cast you off forever.

In II Thessalonians 1:8, listen. Jesus is coming in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God. Yes, you can know Him, but not all men know Him. Oh, it always grips me when I turn on the television and see these jerks on there that are always saying "God is in you". Who is this? Reverend Ike or something. You know. "Your God", oh, we all know God. You know. What is it he says? "You just can't loose with the stuff I use." Boy. And then you always hear this, I remember a movie was out a long, long time ago, many years ago, and it was called "Somebody up there likes me." Boy, if that isn't the most insipid theology. I always think of the New York restaurant owner, Toots Shor, who said "I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for the big man in the sky." Oh. That is not knowing God, believe me.

Alright, to begin with then, a man must know that God is, he must recognize that. Secondly, and I'm just going to mention this, because we'll cover it next time in detail. He must believe or recognize who God is. Okay? Not just that God is, but who God is. That's point two. You know, there are all kinds of people who say "Oh, yes, we believe in God." They don't even know who it is they are believing in. It's just the man upstairs or the somebody in the sky or whatever. And it was this point Paul just absolutely knocked the slats out from under idolatry. And I'm just going to give you two beginning thoughts. First of all, Paul says God is creator. This is who He is. Look at verse 24. I want you to meet the unknown God. He is God who made the world and all things. Now, I'm telling you that's a powerful statement. In the first place, the Epicureans believed that matter was eternal, so nobody made it. And the stoics believed that God was every-thing and in everything--Pantheism--so God couldn't create Himself, and so Paul just shot down that philosophy with his first statement about who God is. But he says He's creator of all. You say, does that mean you don't believe in evolution? That's what it

means. I don't believe in evolution. I believe God created everything, and the Bible defends that. And I accept the Scriptures. In Psalms 146, listen to this. Verse 5. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help whose hope is in the Lord his God who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is." He made everything! He made it all!

And Isaiah's got some tremendous statements about the creative aspect of God. In Isaiah 40:12. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand and measured the heavens with the span and measured the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance." Verse 28. "Hath thou not known, hath thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainth not neither is weary." Who made it all? God made it all.

In Isaiah 45, what a great verse is verse 18. Isaiah 45:18, just listen to this. "For thus saith the Lord who created the heavens. God Himself who formed the earth and made it, He hath established it, He created it not in vain. He formed it to be inhabited. I am the Lord and there is none else." And so we see that God is the creator God. And everything that has been made has been made by Him.

In Zechariah 12:1. "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel saith the Lord who stretcheth forth the heavens and laith the foundation of the earth and formeth the spirit of man within him." God created everything including men.

I can't resist Jeremiah. He's got some tremendous statements. Jeremiah 10:10. And you know, whenever I am talking about God, I'm better off to just read Scripture because all I do with my words is beggar God. I just reduce Him, and I just want to give it to you as He states it. Jeremiah 10:10. Listen. Terrific! "But the Lord is the true God. He is the living God, an everlasting King. At His wrath the earth shall tremble and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation. Thus shall you say unto them." Now watch this. "The gods that have not made the heavens and earth even they shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens." You know that demons always claim to create? These are the false gods that claim to have created. I read a book this weekend in flying from San Jose up and back written by some demons. It was one of those things dictated by demons. Automatic writing books. And all through that the demon hierarchy kept claiming to be the creators. "We created the hierarchy of elder race. We created the Cain race. We created the Abel race. (which is some spiritual beings in this book) We created the sub-race, the human three-dimension race." All these claims to creativity are the claims of false gods. And he says here "the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth." Then in verse 12. "He hath made the earth by His power. He hath established the world by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding." It didn't happen in an evolutionary process and there aren't a whole bunch of gods that made the earth and the heavens. God Himself and He alone is the Creator. And there is absolutely none other beside Him. No other god, therefore there can be no other creator.

"Ah Lord God!" said Jeremiah in 32:17. "Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and outstretched arm and there is nothing too hard for Thee." No, we do not believe in evolution. We believe that God created. Do you know what the faith of an evolutionist is? Have you ever thought of it? Here's an evolutionist's belief. One: no supernatural power created. Two: all creation is a matter of chance. Three: living matter comes from no matter. Four: intelligence, conscious and moral judgment appears with no source. Add it all together and you have Hardy's equation--nobody times nothing equals everything. And then the law of thermodynamics, if you were to study that, you'd find proofs that the very opposite of evolution is true. Everything is going down not up.

So Paul says meet God. Who is He? Creator. And then secondly, and we'll stop here. He is Ruler. He is Lord. Verse 24. "Of heaven and earth." Lord of heaven and earth. In Genesis 14:19. What a statement! I love it. He says, "And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of the Most High God'". Listen. "Possessor of heaven and earth." He didn't only make it. He owns it. He rules it. He is Lord. Boy, some tremendous passages on this. Just tremendous! Psalms 24. I can't resist. Verse 1. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they who dwell therein." He rules everything. It's all His. In Revelation 20:11, you'll remember He destroys it. Doesn't He? He says at the end of verse 24. Watch. "If God made the whole world, if God runs the whole world and all the space around it, then He dwelleth not in" what? "Temples made with hands." You can't confine Him to a building. And you know what these people were doing in Athens? Here was the god in this little box. And here was the god in this little statue. And here was the god in this little shrine. And here was the god in this little temple. And he says God is too big for that. You're confining God. And God will not be confined. Anything, beloved, that limits God to a physical representation diminishes His glory. John Calvin said, "There is nothing in the world that can manifest the glory of God." So Hodge says in his theology, "Idolatry is not only worshipping a statue of the false god, it's worshipping any representation of the true God." Because there is no way to represent Him. I remember some Christian people telling me they had a little place where they prayed and they hung a picture of Jesus there, and they always knelt in front of the picture when they did it. That's idolatry! When you reduce God to that kind of worshipping thing, then you, then you have diminished Him. You have corrupted Him.

In I Kings 8:27. And I am going to make this point, and I am going to quit. 8:27 "Will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens can't contain Thee. How much less this house that I have built." Solomon says that it's a neat temple God. You're too big for it. I Kings 8:27.

The psalmist says in Psalms 139 the same thing. What a masterful psalms. Listen to the words. Psalms 139. "Oh Lord Thou searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting, mine up rising, understandeth my thought afar off. You compass my path and my lying down. You are acquainted with my ways. There is not a word in my tongue but Lord, you know it altogether." He's every-where and knows everything. "You beset me behind and before. You put Your hand on me." I

can't handle this knowledge he says in verse 6. It's too much. Then verse 7. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit or whither shall I flee from Thy presence. If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the outermost part of the sea, even there You make Your right hand hold me. If I say surely the darkness, shall cover me [ha], the night becomes like daylight. The darkness hides not from Thee but the night shines as the day and the darkness and the light are alike to Thee. I will praise Thee." Don't ever reduce God to visible images. You corrupt His glory.

That's why it's just so personal. That's why I don't like pictures of Christ. And that's alright. I mean, as long as you're not bowing down to them. But I don't prefer them, because I don't like to diminish the glory of the Trinity to any kind of three-dimensional thing. It just doesn't do anything for me.

Well, God is not worshipped in shrines, and He's not worshipped in buildings. He's too big for that. Meet God. Creator. Ruler. You say, John, what are you saying all this for? You get to this point and you don't even tell them how to know God. Let me tell you something wonderful. If you will accept what I have told you this morning as the truth and you'll live up to life, believe me, God will give you the rest. Do you believe that? And I'll tell you, it will all come down to this. "No man comes unto the Father", said Jesus, what, "but by Me." You've got to know who God is. But you'll only know Him personally through Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful this morning that the opportunity and privilege is ours to know the living God. Never let us take it lightly. God, help us to realize what a fantastic, overwhelming thing it is to know Thee the only true God. And, Father, we would pray that if there are some in our midst this morning who have not known Thee, who have not met Thee, who grope about seeking to know, that, Lord, this might be the day when they come to know Thee through Jesus Christ. Father, we pray to that end for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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