

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

Needing God, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-96

As we begin our study tonight that we've entitled, "Needing God," -- we started it last week -- I want you to turn in your Bible of Psalm 14. Some familiar words, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" We're very familiar with that statement. It's the statement of the atheists, if not the intellectual atheist, certainly the practical atheist. "They are corrupt. They have committed abominable deeds. There is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from Heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one."

Now those familiar words you're used to hearing from Romans 3. But what I want to do is to point out to you that any kind of atheism, whether it is rational atheism, or whether it is moral atheism, or whether it is practical atheism, or whether it is religious atheism, that is to say you invent a God who is no God, and, therefore, you do not worship a true God, a form of atheism, all of that is inseparably linked to sin.

It is not intellectual. It is not rational. It is not the product of thinking. It is the product of sinning. Our society has become atheistic. As we've been saying, at the elite level, they would fancy themselves rational or intellectual atheists. They'd be better titled, "naturalists," if they could title themselves, or "rationalists," or "materialist."

At the lowest level, you have people who want to live without any compunctions and no one setting any moral standards for them. Now they might say they believe in God, but for all practical reasons, they are moral atheists. They would like to think that it's because they are exercising their freedoms to which they have a right as human beings.

But in the end, all those who refuse to acknowledge and worship the true God, do so, not for intellectual reasons, not for reasons of upholding human freedom, but because they love inequity.

Turn to Romans 1, and this Scripture comes up again and again. And it comes up tonight because in this context, it must be referred to. It says in Verse 21 of Romans 1, "Even though they knew God," that is to say the knowledge of God is in every human mind and every human heart. It is there by virtue of conscience. And it is there by virtue of reason. Reason is built on cause and effect. And all the effects send you back to the original cause, which is God. So reason takes you to God.

Conscience takes you to God because there's a law written in the heart. But even though they knew God, they didn't honor him as God, or give thanks. Instead of doing that, instead of acknowledging the true God, "they became empty in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." And all the while, Verse 22, "They thought they were wise, they were actually fools." And there it is again, they're the atheists. They do not believe in God. Or they live as if there were no God. Or they invent a religion with the wrong God.

But in the end, it's all the garbled message of atheism in one form or another. "They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God, and here is the description of a religious atheist for an image in the form of corruptible man and birds and four-foot animals and crawling creatures."

And immediately we read, "God gave them over to the lust of their hearts," just let them go. That's what they wanted, and God just let them go. The reason they wouldn't believe in Him, they wanted to follow their lusts. And God just stepped back and let them go.

Verse 26, "They went as so far as to commit sin that is unnatural, degrading passions, lesbianism," Verse 27, "homosexuality, men with men doing what is indecent." And then in Verse 28, "They were given over to a depraved mind, filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slanders, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents," and so forth and so on.

Wherever you have the failure to acknowledge God, it is inseparably linked to a love of inequity and the more base kind of inequity. Our society has turned from God, not because of science, not because of philosophy, not because of religion, not because of a love for human freedom, not because of the need to express yourself, not because of wanting to avoid unnecessary guilt, but because they love sin.

We've been looking at that, the influential, evolutionary, naturalistic, materialistic atheists, with their evolutionary explanation of origins and their relativistic morality, ignore reality, and live in irrationality because they choose sin. They may dress up and have PhD, but they love their inequity.

They, "God is nothing more than the product of human imagination, not a person at all who is the creator. Chance is the creator," they say. "There is no supernatural mind. There is no transcendent supernatural rational spirit or being who created or, for that matter, who ever interferes with the orderly and purposeless course of natural mutations and events."

And thus, naturalism frees people from the illusion that antique cultural morals have some permanent validity because there is some universal standard. These intellectuals believe that people who attack scientific naturalism, who attack evolution have the disguised agenda of wanting to stifle sexual

freedom. That's really what they want to preserve.

The fulfillment in their living doesn't come from the intellect. It comes from their lusts. Modernists, we could call them. And now the term is "post-modernists," who believe that morality and law, based upon divine revelation is autocratic, not democratic. It asserts authority over individuals who should have full authority to make their own decisions about morality. So they reject it.

They concede that belief in God may be allowable in the private places for those who are irrational, but it cannot find a place publicly because it threatens freedom. And to threaten freedom is to question one's morality. Modern law and modern law making is not based upon a moral standard. It's based upon rights, everybody's rights, the basic right to do whatever you want to do without disapproval from anybody.

Morality is simply personal and that's the way they want it. They want to feel their lusts and fulfill their lusts. If they want to, they want to do into those degrading lusts where women do what is indecent with other women, and men with other men, and all the way to a reprobate mind, all the sins that come out of that. Men need no God. They want no God. And so they want to live the way their lusts tell them.

But the down side of that is life has no purpose. Life has no meaning. They are protoplasm waiting to become manure. There is no hope. There is no morality. Therefore, there is no fulfillment.

The very best thing, not just the most right and noble thing, the very best thing in life is to know God. And the philosophers and the educators and the intellectuals and scientists and the people of our nation and the people of world desperately need to know the true go. They're not gaining anything by not knowing Him. They're losing everything in time and eternity. And that was what was in the heart of Paul when arrived in the City of Athens.

Let's go to Acts 17 and find him there. He saw a city, wholly given over to idols. He saw a city swept in philosophy and religion and intellectualism and rationalism. And here he confronted the great City of Athens. But in all that they knew, they didn't know God. Paul couldn't really just be there and not tell them. So in Verse 22 it says, "He stood in the midst of the Areopagus." Now the Areopagus was the supreme court of Athens. It was the judges. It was the philosophers. It was the educators. It was the elite minds of Athens. It's where the decisive things were discussed, and decisions made.

They were in charge. As I told you last time, it was at that very court that leaders and philosophers of the past had to ply their trade and offer their wisdom, and were judged to be true or false. Paul went to that place to confront them about the true God. His purpose was to introduce them to God. He said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you're very religious in all respects." That's the start, but far from the proper ending.

Realizing that they were religious atheists, rather than naturalists or materialists who believed in evolution -- evolution didn't come along for a long time after this. And they may have had some moral scruples to some degree. They were not necessarily morally abandoned. But he does realize that whatever it is, they have plugged into the wrong deity, which in effect, makes them atheists because they don't know the true God. They, thus, live without him.

And he wants to simply tell them three things: God is. Who God is. And what God requires. And like any good preacher, he has that three-point sermon. Point Number One: God is. Verse 23, "For a while, I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship. I also found an altar with this inscription to an unknown god, what or whom, therefore, you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you," or this one. "I'm gonna tell you about the God you don't know. I'm gonna tell you about God."

And you remember Hebrews 11:6, "He that comes to God must believe that He is." You have to start by being a theist. You have to start by believing in the one true God, that He exists. This involves tearing down all atheistic concepts, all wrong concepts. You have to abandon your naturalistic, materialistic rationalism. You have to abandon your awe morality. You have to abandon your false religion and come to the knowledge of the true God.

Although the Greeks were very religious, addicted one might say to a pantheon of deities, they did not worship the true God. So they never knew truth. They never knew righteousness. They never knew peace, forgiveness, or hope.

So Paul says, "God is" -- and we talked about that last time -- "God is, and is knowable. That's basically, what Romans 1 is saying, "You can know much about the God who really is." You can know His eternal power. You can know His God head. And you can know something of His standards because He's written His law in your hearts. "God is, and is knowable." He does not have to be unknown God.

Now secondly, Paul is concerned to tell them who God is. It's one thing to say He is. It's something else to describe Him. They might come to all manner of conclusions about who this God is, if Paul did not give them the facts, and he does.

Verse 24, he starts where you have to start, "The God who made the world and all things in it. I'm going to introduce you to the creator." Now nobody threw their hands up and said, "Sorry, we believe in nobody times nothing equals everything." They didn't throw their hands up and say, "Well we don't believe there was a creator. We just think it all came out of some kind of a primeval ooze." They didn't say that once there was an amoeba floating around and it said to itself, "I think I'll be two," and the two looked at each other and said, "Let's be four," and away we went.

They didn't have that problem. Nobody had concocted such an irrational perspective. Their minds were still functioning and still intact in that day. And it was very apparent to them that there had to be a universal cause for this massive effect in which they lived called the world.

And so God is introduced to them as Creator. The God we're talking about is the creator. He is not a creation. He is not an emanation. He is the creator.

Secondly, He is the ruler, because in Verse 24 -- and we're just reviewing here -- since He is Lord of Heaven and earth, He is sovereign. He is transcendent. He is spiritual. He is immense. He is omnipresent. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient, all of that really bound up in His sovereignty over Heaven and earth, and is not dwelling with temples made with hands. He is transcendent, immense, massive, all of that, spiritual, and sovereign. We're talking about, not only the God who is creator, but the God who is sustainer and the God who is in charge of everything, sovereign.

And then, thirdly, He is the self-sufficient one. Verse 25, "Neither is He served by human hands as though He needed anything." He doesn't need anything. He doesn't lack anything. He's not like us. He doesn't have any faults. He doesn't have any lack. He needs absolutely nothing. He is the self-sufficient one.

And then fourthly -- and this is where we stopped -- He is the giver of life. At the end of Verse 25, "He, Himself, gives to all people life and breath and everything." Basically, He's in charge of everything. He created everything. He sustains everything. And he provides everything, absolutely everything. This, then, is the ultimate God. This is the true and living God who alone is creator, ruler, self-sufficient sustainer of the universe.

In Psalm 104, the Psalmist is talking about the animals. He says, "They all wait for Thee to give them their food in due season. Thou doest give to them, they gather it up. Thou doest open Thy hand, they are satisfied with good. Thou doest hide Thy face, they are dismayed. Thou doest take away their spirit, they expire and return to their dust.

"When you decide that you're not gonna give them life anymore, they die. You give them life. You feed them. You designed the computer in their little mind, all these animals, everything from a tiny insect to a massive elephant, and everything in between."

And Leviathan, himself is even mentioned here, the sea monster, the great whales. "You are the one who created them. You are the one who fed them. You send forth your Spirit, they are created. And you renew the face of the ground. You do it all. You're in charge of it all." All those mechanisms that operate in the whole of the animal world, and the plant world, for that matter, all of that is designed by, prepared by, given by, and managed by, operated by God, Himself.

Job 12:9 and 10, "Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? Now we're talking a God here that you oughta know. This isn't Zeus, here folks. This isn't Mars. This isn't Venus. We're not talking about Aphrodite here. We're not talking about any of the gods that you have come to know. We're not talking about Cupid or Arras, of these kinda quirky little deities who all had a little niche here. We're talking about the Creator, sovereign, ruler, spiritual, immense, omnipresent, self-sufficient, source of life for every single thing in existence. That's the God we're talking about."

And believe me; they knew of whom he spoke. They didn't know God, but they knew the description of the kind of deity that he was telling them. I should, perhaps, mention also, I think it's the 33rd Chapter of Job, in Verse 4, "The spirit of God has made me. And the breath of the Almighty gives me life." Where else? That's why later on in the Book of Romans, after, of course, the first chapter that we read, in Chapter 11, it says, "Verse 33, "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways."

And then Verse 36, "For from Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." We're talking about the one true God. And then he adds something else, "He is the controller." Verse 26, "He made from one, from one Adam." All started there. "Every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth." He not only made them all, that is, He's responsible for races, people, people groups. But he determined their appointed times, when they would come into existence. And he appointed the boundaries of their habitation.

He determined who and where and when. He is the controller of history. He is the controller of destiny. I supposed the Athenians were not unusual, but they did pride themselves on being unique. They prided themselves on having sprung from the soil of their native Attica. And frankly, these cultured Greeks looked at everybody else and gave them a bit label.

There were the Greeks and the Barbarians. Barbarians, that's an onomatopoeic word. What is that? That's a word that sounds like its meaning. Buzz of a bee is onomatopoeic word. The clank of something is an onomatopoeic word. And Barbarians is simply a form of the onomatopoeic term, "Bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar," because that's how the Greeks thought they talked. Since they didn't speak Greek, it sounded like, "Bar, bar, bar, bar, bar." (*Laughter*) So they called them "Barbarians." (*Laughter*)

It was really a term of derision. It was a mocking term. But God is the one who raised up every nation, including the Greeks, including the Barbarians. He made them all out of one. Some of the later manuscripts say one blood, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. He'd appointed their appointed times. He determined their appointed times, when a nation would rise, and when a nation would fall. And the history of the world is the history of the purposes of God unfolding.

He is the controller of history. And He even appointed the boundaries of their habitation.

God is charge of their territories. For example, look at Europe. And Europe has just gone through an unbelievable change, hasn't it? Once countries, and now all of a sudden, fragmented into more ancient countries. Once Yugoslavia, now split into all kinds of little pieces and killing each other over it. Once the Soviet Union, boom, 16 separate nations in one fell swoop, and many of them at war with each other. All of that fits within the purposes of God and the boundary of their habitation and the time of their existence, including Israel, including Russia, including Egypt, including America.

When you see the term, "appointed times, that has to do with historical, seasonal. Bounds of habitation, that has to do with continental and imperial.

Reminds me of Psalm 31:15 where the Psalmists said, "My times are in Your hands." The God we're talking about here is Creator. He's Ruler. He's Self-Sufficient One. He is Giver of Life, Source of Everything, and Controller of All Human History. And then He is Revealer. He is Revealer.

Here's the climax, in Verse 27. Why did God go through all of this creating and ruling and giving life and controlling it? Well, it was all part of His revelation of Himself. Verse 27, "That they should seek God, God's object in creation, God's object in preservation, God's object in providence, God's object in history is to disclose Himself." We could call that "natural revelation," that they should seek God. If perhaps, they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

The point is this; nobody should ever have to make an altar to the unknown God. You can see around you the God who is creator, ruler, preserver, giver of life, the God of history, he has revealed himself all around you, as Romans 1 says, "He has revealed Himself in you," Romans 2, "in your conscience so that the Law of God is written in your heart."

Knowledge of God is all around you. Men should never fall to atheism. They should never turn to idolatry. There's no excuse, Romans 1 says. God arranged everything so that men would very naturally seek Him. He is visible to them externally, as they look at the creation. He is visible to them internally, as they feel the impulses of conscience. And if men would only acknowledge that natural revelation and not pervert the truth, but feel after Him and find Him. It's like there's a dim, dim light and you can see the reality and you begin to move toward it, perhaps, or better yet, in hope that they might find Him.

Now we talk about sovereign election a lot. Now here's the other poll. Men have enough revelation to be seeking after the God who has revealed Himself in creation and in conscience. God has plunked man down in this limitless universe right on a planet where all of His works are visible, all of those works which can confirm His existence and His God head and His immense power. God has when placed His knowledge in man in hope that man would see the shady light of natural revelation

and feel after the full light.

Instead, man saw the glimmers of light and turns around and pursues the darkness. And men love darkness rather than light for one reason. What is it? Their deeds are evil. It is not intellectual. It is moral. All nations, all men, whoever they are, have the same opportunity to see God revealed in the natural creation. You're not gonna see Him in shrines and idols such as were all over the place in Athens, but in and around your very existence. God is revealer.

Sadly, the optative tense -- I don't want to get technical. For you that know what that means, it's fine - the optative tense is used here, suggesting that God's intention had not been fulfilled. That's consistent with Romans 1. When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, turned around, and plunged into inequity. That's the issue. That's the issue.

Sometimes when I'm asked if I would go and debate an atheist -- and I've been asked to do that a couple of times -- or when I would go and debate a rationalist or a materialist or whatever, my response to that has always been, "This is not an intellectual argument. This is a sin issue. It can't be resolved by a discussion of what is rational. It has to be resolved by a discussion of what is moral." And that just makes them mad.

God back to Acts 14 and you'll see a somewhat similar situation here. Paul and Barnabas are at Lystra, and Paul preaches. These people are a little confused. They think Barnabas is Zeus, and Paul is Hermes. And there's a reason for that, some historical background. But Verse 15, this is what Paul says, "Men, why are you doing these things?" They bring him a bunch of sacrifices, a bunch of offerings. They bring him oxen and garlands, and they wanted to offer sacrifices.

And Paul and Barnabas got so upset they started ripping their clothes, which was supposed to demonstrate their horror. And then they said, "We are men of the same nature as you. And we preach the Gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vein things," to whom?

He doesn't say the evangelical, orthodox, fundamental God of the Jews. They wouldn't understand that. "To the living God who made the Heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." That's the issue. "You must know the God who is the creator. And in generations gone by, He permitted all the nations to go their own ways, and yet didn't leave Himself without witness."

That sums up the same thing. The witness is there. The evidence is there externally. The evidence is there internally. The witness is there. You can see it around you. Even in His providence, He did good, gave you rain from Heaven, fruitful seasons, satisfied your heart with food and gladness. He's revealed Himself in His creation. He's revealed Himself in conscience. He's revealed Himself in providence in His goodness.

You must know that He is a good God. Look at the love and the joy and the beauty of the world, the God who is creator. But with all that revelation, He allowed all nations gone by, all generations gone by to go their own way. And that's what they do. And that's what ours is doing.

And the anchor of a Christian heritage has been ripped out long ago. And the ship is in the storm without anything to hold it.

Now go back to Acts 17. He says in Verse 27, that God is not far from each one of us. Now what he means by that is we're responsible and without excuse. This God is transcendent and immense and spiritual, and yet He is near. And you don't really have to search very far. It's not like it's an impossible journey.

Psalms 145 really is important in connection with this. Psalm 145:18, "the Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." So what does it take? What does it take to move someone who can see the dim light of the reality of God toward the full light? Answer: Calling upon God.

What did a person who never heard the Gospel need to do? What does a person who'd never heard the Gospel need to do? When conscience speaks of the truth of God, when creation speaks of the truth of God, the answer is to call upon Him and He will answer. Where there is a genuine, honest heart desire to know the true and living God, the Lord is hear to all who call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth, that is honestly, He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him. He will also hear their cry and will save them. And there's another very important component.

Calling upon the name of the Lord, realizing that He exists, realizing something of who He is by the virtue of the creation and conscience, having a healthy fear because you know your own sin, crying out, out of fear, and being saved. What do you have then? You have someone who believes that God exists, believed that God is truly the creator, believed that God has revealed Himself not only in His creation, but in conscience, and being pricked by that conscience. Fearing what God will do to you because of your sin, your cry out to be delivered.

That's where I believe a person who doesn't know the Gospel begins to move in the direction of the light. And when they move that way, God will hear and answer that prayer. He will draw near with the necessary saving truth.

Verse 28 simply goes further, to tell us how near He is. "For in Him we live and move and exist." In other words, we're surrounded by Him. He's everywhere, His power, His providence, His presence, His law, it's everywhere. And Paul wants to support that reality that God is very near. So he quotes a couple of the Greek poets. He says, "Even as some of your own poets have said, for we also are His

offspring. Being then, the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."

He's quoting Areopagus first, and then he quotes a poet by the name of Radis. They meant those words for some of the deities of their own invention. But the point is simply this: these men, even apart from the true God, could recognize that they came from God and were surrounded by God. In other words, God was not limited to gold, silver, or stone. He was bigger than that.

And they were the offspring of God. So even in their paganism, they knew that God was the creator and that God was immense. Even your own poets recognize the creator. Even your own poets recognize the sustainer that someone rules, that someone controls history, that someone gives life. Everybody knows that, even pagans know that. We live in a very unique time in human history when people say, "That is not the case, the first time in history, since the invention of evolution."

These people were intelligent enough to realize that there was a creator and a sustainer and a ruler and a controller of human history and one who gave life. Even their own poets supported it. We are the offspring of God. And if that's true, then God can't be gold. Gold doesn't give birth to anything. He can't be silver. He can't be stone. He can't be an image formed by the art and thought of man, and be the creator.

He has to be more than a manmade idol. If you really want to know God, don't look at an idol. If you want to know God, look out and look in, and see creation and listen to conscience.

So, what do we have to say to our atheists in society? First, God is. And secondly, this is who God is. And He's not very far away. And if you look ahead, you can see the dim light of truth, the shady light of truth through creation and conscience. And if you're willing to move in that direction, the light gets brighter and brighter. And God will deliver to you the truth of Jesus Christ, if you desire to draw near to Him, fearing Him and crying out for forgiveness of sin.

And that brings us to the third and final point, recognizing what God requires. We not only need to recognize God is, and who God is, but what God requires. And this is crucial. If suppose there are many people who might go from Step One to Step Two and say, "I believe God is. And I believe he is creator, sustainer, controller, and all of that, sovereign." But you have to come to the third point. Or you can take Step One and Step Two and end up in eternal Hell.

Verse 30, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent." Now this is a very interesting statement, very interesting. The word "ignorance" is just that. There were times of ignorance. It means, when it says, "God overlooked them," that He didn't actively interfere with special judgment.

He dealt with them according to the light they had in Old Testament times. In other words, there was no Gospel. There was nothing about Christ. There was not the fullness and the richness of the new covenant, New Testament. And by the way, this doesn't mean sin didn't go unpunished. Sin was always punished. Sin has its own pain. It runs its own inevitable course of disease and death. What a man sows, he reaps. That's a standard principal.

But it was really consequential to sin, the kind of judgment that is consequential, rather than special judgment. God allowed nations apart from Israel, nations on other parts of the world, nowhere near Israel. He allowed them to live the way they lived and to be responsible only to know what they could know. To live up to the light they had, is a way to put it.

And then He, in His mercy, applied the efficacy of the work of Jesus Christ yet to come to those upon whom His spirit produced faith. But there was no written law. The Gentiles didn't have a written law. Paul says that in Romans 2. And there were lots of folk on the other side of the world who wouldn't have even known what going on in Israel. But they were responsible to live up to the law of their conscience. They were responsible to live up to whatever light they had.

But it says there in Verse 30, "Having overlooked those times of ignorance, God is now declaring that all men everywhere must repent." There was a time when God overlooked things. Not any more. Not anymore. You can't claim ignorance. They had the mind and reason, which looking at creation, would lead them to God, and then God would respond. They had conscience, the law written in their hearts. They had the rain and the season, the crops, providence.

And if they acknowledged God as the creator, sustainer, provident God who did all of that, and worshiped Him, the true God, as the Spirit of God moved in their hearts, God overlooked the remaining ignorance, the fact that they didn't have the written law. They didn't have the Gospel.

And some Gentiles did to that. In fact, though not having the law, Romans 2 says, they were a law unto themselves. And they show the work of the law written in their hearts. And God accepted that. And in those folks, he withheld His special judgment. It's a very difficult issue to understand fully, simply to say this; there were people who would never have heard the Law of God. There are people long gone, who never heard the Gospel, because they lived before Jesus ever came. God dealt with them according to the light they had.

What about now? He commands all men everywhere to repent. Why now? "Because," Verse 31, "He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof," listen to this one, to whom? "All men by raising Him from the dead."

This is a very powerful, powerful statement. We live in a time when God is not overlooking anything. We live in a time when we are responsible to preach the Gospel to every creature on the face of the earth. We live in a time when there is neither salvation in any other name than the name of Jesus Christ. We live in a time when in order for someone to be saved, they have to hear about Jesus Christ.

You say, "What about those people living in ancient times who weren't around?" I don't know how to answer that other than to say that somehow God would bring to them the truth. God has no limits. If they lived up to the light they had, He would give them the light of Christ.

And there's a sense in which John 1:9 says, "Christ is the light that lights every man that comes into the world." But the issue here is now you need to know Christ who is the judgment man. God says, "I overlooked special judgment. I let special judgment pass by and left you to the consequence of your sin." and for most of the world, certainly that meant damnation, because instead of going toward the light, they went back toward the darkness because of their love of sin. And that's exactly what Romans 1 is saying, "When they knew God, they turned their back and went the other way." That's the problem.

"But now," He says, "I don't overlook because of ignorance. Because a day has been set in which I'm gonna judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ." He is the judge, the proof that He has been exalted to that position, is His resurrection from the dead.

Without going into any more details, let me give you the general sweep of this. What he is saying is simply this, "God is. This is who God is. And what does God require? God requires that you prepare for the coming of judgment." That's the issue.

Annie Dillard has written a book called *Teaching the Stones to Talk*, interesting title. And in it, she asks pointedly if Christians genuinely believe in the powerful God they so regularly and unreflectively address and worship. She's really criticizing the church for it's flippancy about God.

This is what she writes, "Churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church. We should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares. They should lash us to our pews, for our sleeping God may wake someday and take offense." It's true.

It's not at time to deal with God in trivialities. God revealed in Jesus Christ as no gentle Jesus, meek and mild. But rather, Christ is the one who grabs us by the scruff of the neck to shake loose from us all false images of deity we have cherished. He's one who is the great Himself, the iconoclasts

mashing to bits our trivial gods and our trivial understanding of Him.

He is the consuming fire, calling us to repentance. And that's really, where Paul was going there on Mars Hill. He was going right at the issue of repentance, right at the issue of judgment. And he must have preached sin. And he must have preached salvation, because down in Verse 34 it says, "Some men joined him and believed. Among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite;" must have been a dignitary of some kind, a member of the tribunal, the high council, the Supreme Court. "A woman named Damaris and others."

He preached, no doubt, the cross, which is the solution to the judgment. So when we talk to an atheistic society, we want to tell them that God is. We want to tell them who God is. We want to tell them what God requires. And what God requires is punishment for sin. And God requires that you know the truth, because He's not overlooking anything anymore. He says, "He is now declaring to all men that they must repent." They must repent.

And if they repent, obviously, somebody's gonna say, "Well what about the cross?" Obviously, he preached the cross. It was He, Himself, who said, "He knew nothing among you but Christ and Him, crucified." They need to repent. Why repent? Why turn to Christ? Why acknowledge this Savior? Because God had fixed a day in which He would judge the world. The proof of that was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It guarantees that he is God's choice for judge.

Just in case somebody might doubt it, He raised Him from the dead. So Paul really ends where you have to end, with the resurrection. Somebody might say, "Well, I think He blew it. This is a pretty hard shot. Couldn't He have been a little more subtle?" No. He was determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified.

"I will say nothing about anything except Christ. My boast is in Christ." He says that over and over again. And he takes them all the way to the resurrection, which verifies everything. Psalm, Verse 32, were sneering at it. Those are the rejecters. Some were saying, "Well, we'll listen to you some other time on this." Those were the postponers. Then Paul left. And then there were the believers.

This is what is so desperately needed in our society, a confrontational proclamation of judgment. We need to proclaim judgment; because the day is coming -- "the day" being the Day of the Lord -- the Day of Judgment is coming and it is gonna sweep away souls into Hell.

You can't deal with that on a trivial basis. You can't deal with it on a shallow basis. And you can't somehow soften the message. If you saw a group of people sitting on a train track having a picnic with a locomotive a quarter of a mile away, coming around the curve, your subtleties would disappear immediately and you would frantically tell them the truth.

And so it is with the immanency of judgment. And Paul is there on Mars Hill and all he can say is, "Look, there was a time when this God overlooked people's ignorance. But that is not now, because Christ has come. And Christ has died. And Christ has risen and is ready to forgive your sin. And if you don't turn to Him, you will perish in the horrors of judgment."

And that's the message that must be given. And again, I suppose there's a place for debating some of these issues. But in the end, what needs to happen is you have to confront the atheists who rationally disregard God, morally disregard God, or religiously disregard God, and call them to attention with regard to imminent judgment. If I was gonna get into a debate with one of those people, I would want to talk about now how the world began so much as how it's going to end.

Let's talk about judgment. Well, I don't know how long that conversation would last, but that is the issue. I don't mean by that, that we want to become abrasive or abusive or insensitive or unkind or lacking in love. But such as times as we live in, call for strong messages.

We remember, don't we, a few weeks ago, we talked a little bit about Jeremiah. And he had to preach a strong message and they hated it and they threw him in a pit and sent him off to Egypt and martyred him, martyred at the hands of his own people, that I don't think it's ever a popular message. And self-preservation sorta wants you to soften it a little, but we can't do that.

We are glad to stand up and tell people, "God is. Let me introduce you to the God who is. Let me introduce you to the unknown God, the creator, the ruler, the sustainer, the God of providence, the self-sufficient, immense, spiritual one, the one who controls all of history, the one who revealed Himself in creation and conscience. Let me tell you, this God does exist. Let me tell you who He is. And now that you know who He is, let me tell you what He requires. And what He requires is the forgiveness of your sin, or you will perish in eternal judgment."

Not really too difficult. When we go into all the world then, and preach the Gospel to every creature, that's what we say. It's more than just, "Please, may I say this? And don't be offended." It's more than just telling p how nice it is to be a Christian. It's more than just telling people how rich your life is and how happy and how fulfilled and how wonderful. It's much more than that. It's more than just encouraging people to share in something that has made your life so rich.

Its judgment and hell and you have to see that. It's not nearly so serious if somebody doesn't want to joint the party. That's only one thing if somebody doesn't want to get in on the good stuff. It's a whole different thing to realize they're gonna burn forever if they don't.

And so we must encourage them to come to know the true God. People need God. We can't expect any other kind of behavior than what we seen, can we? It's all outlined in the Book of Romans, that's

exactly what they're gonna do. When they know God, they're gonna reject him. They're without excuse. But they're gonna do it. When you show them the glimmer of light, they're gonna turn and run to the darkness because they love their lust and they love their wickedness.

We have to understand that. We have to understand that their hearts are deceitful and they're continually self-deceived about their own life and their own condition. So there has to be a large measure of compassion. I'm very concerned, as I've told you before, about Christians seeing non-Christians in a declining culture like this, as the enemy, rather than the mission field. I'm very concerned about us hating those people.

In the Bible conference this week, Alistair Begg speaking -- he's got more illustrations about the Beatles than any 10 people I know. *(Laughter)*he grew up in the Beetle era. He was a longhaired, London rocker before the Lord got a hold of his life and he got a haircut. *(Laughter)*But he was telling a story about, I guess it was on the recent news when they did an anthology or something on Beatles, he said. His experience with them in years past caused him to look at it.

But the Beatles had flown in from somewhere and they were having a tremendous impact on the world through their music and they came flying in to land, I think it was Heathrow in London, or maybe it was in America. I guess it was in America, some major city in America. And a whole bunch of Christians showed up at their landing and filled barrels with their albums and waited for them on the tarmac. And when they came off the plane, they torched all of their music.

This was a group of fundamentalist Christians expressing their outrage with that music to the Beatles. So they come off the plane and their exposure to fundamentalist Christianity is one of bitter hatred.

What is accomplished? We're not asking for that. That accomplishes nothing. In fact, it was John Lennon who went to a microphone and said, "Look, we're not saying we're God. We're just popular. And we're not even sure why." They need to know the true God. That's the problem. And you can't despise them.

I don't like what I see in my culture. I don't like what politicians do. I don't like what educators do. I don't like what movie stars do and famous athletes. I don't like the kind of life they live. I don't like the way this culture's going. I don't like the kind of music that's being sung.

But I've got to understand that these people are headed toward eternal judgment and they are in love with the darkness and trapped in their own lusts. And the thing that I must do is, with compassion, proclaim to them the truth. And people with lots of tattoos and nose rings and blue hair, that's a jump for me. But I have to see beyond those superficial things that threaten the comfort zone in my cultural identification to the lostness of the heart. That's where we are.

We have a society that needs God. Listen, who is gonna tell them? Who is gonna reach them? Who is gonna introduce to them the true God, the God who is, the God who is judge, but also the God who is Savior? It's us. What a calling. What a calling.

Father, thank You for our time tonight in Your Word. Thank You again for reminding us of this awesome responsibility. And we pray that You'll give us influence, oh Lord, with the lost around us, whether they're in family or friends or whether they're just acquaintances, people at school or work. Lord, help us to understand how they need You.

Help us to see them the way Paul did and walked right into the Areopagus and said, "Men, listen to me." Hold no punches. Lord, give us those opportunities. Maybe they won't be as dramatic as that. Maybe we'll never talk to the supreme court of the state or the supreme court of the nation or people in high places or philosophers or educators, but on the other hand, maybe we will.

We can certainly talk to the people You bring into our life. We can certainly confront the professors and teachers we have at school who are living in this terrible, terrible willful ignorance. Lord, give us a passion and a compassion to turn them toward the light. And that calling is a privilege.

We are ambassadors for Christ. As though God did beseech through us, be reconciled to God. What a tremendous privilege to be Your ambassadors, telling sinners that they can be reconciled to You through faith in Christ. And may we accept that responsibility and fulfill it faithfully in His dear name, Amen.

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