

DO WE WORSHIP AN UNKNOWN GOD?

ACTS 17:22-23 • TV080A

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Acts 17:22-23

“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

Here’s our topic for today, a question: **“DO WE WORSHIP AN UNKNOWN GOD?”**

And our text is found in **Acts chapter 17**. I’m going to read **verses 22 and 23**.

I want you to follow in your Bible. Keep your Bible open in your hand. We are going to begin at **verse 22** and the Lord willing, read on through **verse 30** as I proceed with the message.

In **Acts 17: 22**: *“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said: Ye men of Athens I perceive that in all things you are most superstitious (more religious than most).”* The word *“superstitious”* is used there but a better translation is; I perceive that you are more religious than most nations.

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“For I passed by and beheld your devotions (objects of worship, your shrines, your altars) and I found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God, whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

Now my friend; there’s can be nothing as dismal and depressing as the thought of going through life holding to a religious faith or to a religious profession only to find at the Judgment that I never really knew the living God, that I had been worshipping a false idea of God, my own idea of God, and I have never known the living God.

There’s no thought that can be as depressing or dismal as that thought and find at the Judgment to hear God say: *“Depart from me I never knew you.”*

Our Lord Jesus Christ in His great priestly prayer, **John 17** says: *“This is eternal life to know God (the living God), the true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.”*

And then in **Philippians chapter 3:10** Paul prayed: *“O that I may know him and the power of his resurrection (His resurrected life).”*

And then in **1 John 5:20** the apostle John wrote; *“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”*

The Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know God, the God that is true, and that we’re in Him. This is the true God and this is eternal life.

Do we worship an unknown God or do we really know the living God, the true God, and the God of whom David spake when he said; *“As the deer panteth for the water brook, so panteth my soul for thee, the living God.”*

Now, it’s remarkable how this Scripture applies to our day. As I read it and as I bring out the points that I believe God has laid on my heart; you are going to be amazed at how the Scripture applies and how it fits our present day. It’s as if it was spoken from the pulpit just this morning.

Now Paul had been preaching the Gospel in Thessalonica and some religious leaders there opposed his Gospel and they stirred up the people against Paul. And Paul had to leave the city of Thessalonica and go down into Berea.

As there the people heard him. He preached the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of redemption, the Gospel of God’s grace, the Gospel of God’s glory, the resurrection of the dead, and hope in Christ Jesus.

And these same fellows, these religious leaders from Thessalonica, came down to Berea and they stirred up the people in Berea. Paul had to leave there and he went down into Athens and they told him to go to Athens and wait there for Silas and Timothy to join him.

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Now, while Paul waited in Athens for Silas and Timothy to join him his spirit was stirred because he saw that the city was full of idols. He walked through the city and he saw that it was full of idols and false religion.

So, Paul began to speak in the synagogue. There was a synagogue there in Athens. He began to speak in the synagogue. He went down to the marketplace and preached. And he preached wherever men would hear him, the apostle Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And in this great city of Athens, a city of idols, a city of religion, a city of shrines and a city of altars; Paul's soul was vexed and stirred because of what he had seen and he was greatly troubled about it.

Now, Athens was not only full of idols and full of religious shrines but Athens, the city of Athens, was full of philosophers and so-called wise men who had many opinions about God and sin and about the law, about life and death, about resurrection and about eternal life.

They all prided themselves on their knowledge and their religious philosophies. And they often gathered at a certain place called Areopagus. That was the court of Areopagus, commonly called "Mars Hill," I suppose, as the marginal reference says.

But, there these wise men and philosophers and religious teachers would gather and they would exchange ideas. They were forever exchanging ideas about God and about creation and about resurrection and about eternal life and about all of these things.

They all had different ideas and there they would meet to exchange their ideas. It sort of reminds you a little bit of the present-day Sunday school classes or Bible classes where people meet and they exchange their religious ideas about what they think and what they believe. Seldom do they talk about what God says. But these men met in this certain place and they would exchange ideas.

And when they heard Paul preach they called him a "babbler." And they heard him preach about Christ and eternal life in Christ. They said: "*What is this new doctrine? You bring strange things to our ears; what do they mean?*"

And so, they took Paul to this Mars Hill place, to this court of Areopagus in order to hear him. It doesn't say that they forced him to go or that they imprisoned him or they put him under arrest; they just took him to this court and there all of these wise men were sitting about and Paul stood in their midst.

And this is where he preached his great message called, "The sermon on Mars Hill." This is the way it began; this is where my text started a moment ago, that I read to you a few moments ago; "*Ye men of Athens.*"

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Now, here he is standing in the midst of these people. Now, somebody said that the city of Athens in the days of Nero had something like 30,000 statues. That's not counting those that were in the people's homes.

They had shrines and altars and statues just everywhere. Another person said, "It was easier to find a god in Athens than to find a man."

And here Paul stood in the midst of these men who prided themselves on their religion, on their doctrines, on their philosophies, and on their wisdom and intellect, and they had their own ideas about everything.

And he stood in their midst and this is what he said: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that you are more religious than most people, you are more religious." Isn't that true of America?

"When you have walked your streets, the streets of your city and I have seen your statues, I have seen your idols; I have seen your shrines. I have seen your religious buildings, I've seen your altars, I've seen your idols, and I perceive that you are certainly more religious than most people."

Isn't that true of America? If you walk the streets of America there's a church on about every corner, hundreds of churches. We have more cults, more sects, and more religious denominations than any nation.

We have more festivals, more feasts, more holidays, and more religious meetings, than any other nation. We have more churches, more chapels, more cathedrals, and more temples, than any other nation.

We have more religious programs and promotions and projects than any other nation. This is true. "I perceive that you are more religious than most nations." That's what Paul said to these men. "You are religious; I can see that."

And this is what I say to America; America, ye men and women of America; I perceive that you are religious. There's no denying that. And I perceive that you are more religious than most nations.

Yet, the living God is unknown among you, the living God, the true and living God!

Your religion; you have religious shrines, organizations, altars, devotions, holidays, festivals, and feast days, but the living God is unknown. I passed by your shrines and altars and I found an inscription to the "unknown God."

Now, why do they do this? Well, these people had a created god. They had created a god from their own mind and their own imagination, all sorts of gods. They originated in the minds of these people.

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They knew the limitations of their god. They knew the ability of their god, the strength of their god, what their god could do or would do or wouldn't do. They originated in the minds of the people, in the imagination of the people.

You've heard people talking about "my God wouldn't do this or my God wouldn't do that, or my God says this and my Bible says that." They had created their own god. I suppose they gave them all names.

And we've given our gods names too. We've originated a god from of our imagination in America. We call him the, "man upstairs," or we call him, "Jesus Christ Superstar," or we call him, "somebody up there."

Now that is a good name for God isn't it, "somebody up there who likes me." Or we call him; I guess people call him, "the good Lord," the good Lord did this and the good Lord did that and may the good Lord bless you."

Then there's the Baptist God, the Catholic God, the Jewish God, the Protestant God, and this God and that God. Everybody has a God that has a certain limitation, a God that they have created, originated in their own minds and thoughts.

And that's what Paul said to these men; now don't get offended; let's listen, he said: "Ye men of Athens; I walked through your city. I saw all your shrines and idols. I saw your statues and I saw your religious buildings and I perceive that you are more religious than most people. And I saw all of your devotions and I saw an altar and I read the inscription; it says: 'To the unknown God.' Now that's the God I'm going to preach to you, the God whom you ignorantly worship." *"Him I declare unto you."*

The reason they put that altar there was just in case they had missed a god somewhere along the line, so they created an altar to an unknown God. Paul said, "This is the true God; this is the living God, the one you do not know. He's the living God."

"The rest of these gods are idols. In all your religious zeal, in all your religious enthusiasm, you have missed the living God. He's unknown to you." Is that possible, is that possible? Well, that's what the apostle Paul said under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

"Now all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable. And man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that procedeth from the mouth of God." And this is God's Word that I'm reading here in **Acts 17:22 and 23**.

"Ye men of Athens I know you are religious. I know you are religious and I passed by and saw your devotions and your shrines. But the God whom you do not know, the God whom you ignorantly worship, 'the unknown God;' He's the living God. And all these gods that you've created in your thoughts and your imaginations are idols; they are not God. You do not know the living God."

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And then Paul begins to describe the living God. Now; I want you to look at your Bible there in **verse 24**: “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*”

Paul then declared the living God. Who is the living God? And as we read this, you can determine if you know the living God.

God is not who I think He is; God is who He is. God is not who I say God is; God is who God says He is. We do not say: “Well; I think God ought to do this.” No, God does what He does and He’s right because He does it.

We don’t determine it. This is what these people had done, these wise men, these philosophers, and religious leaders. They had, they had made them a god. And they had fenced him in according to their own proportions and directions and so-forth.

And Paul says: “I’m going to preach to you the living God.”

First of all, now look at it in, **verse 24**;, the living God of whom I speak; “*Made the world and all things therein.*”

That’s the first statement He makes, the living God made the world and all things therein. “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” In **John 1:1** it says this; “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and all things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.*”

Now your god may be the god of evolution but the living God is the God of creation and they are not both Gods. And Paul said, “This unknown God, unknown to you, but He’s the living God” and, “*He made the world and all things therein.*”

He made the universe and all things there and He created it by the Word of His power according to His own purpose.

Secondly: **Verse 24**, “*God made the world and He is Lord of heaven and earth.*”

He’s not a figure-head; He’s the Lord. He’s not a rubber stamp; He’s the King. “*He’s the Lord of heaven and earth.*” Daniel wrote in **chapter 4:32**: “*The most high God ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*” That’s the living God.

In **Daniel 4:35** he said: “*God doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say unto him, what doest thou?*”

David wrote in **Psalms 135:6**: “*Whatsoever the Lord pleased; that did He in heaven, in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places.*” That’s the God of the Bible. That’s the living God.

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“Well, my God wouldn’t do that. That’s not a description of my God.” This is what I’m saying: Do we worship an unknown God? Paul was speaking to these people. This is what he accused them of doing, worshipping an unknown God.

And Paul says; “The living God created the heavens and the earth and all things therein. He’s the Lord of the heaven and the earth. He has all authority in heaven and in earth and all power over all flesh to do what He will, when He will, with whom He will, and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, what doest thou?”

“He declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying: My counsel shall stand.”

Thirdly: **Verse 24** again: “*God dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*” Now, you can build a temple and house your god but you can’t house the living God. And you can build you a church or a cathedral, no matter how elaborate and call it the “House of God.” And your god may dwell in that Cathedral, “*but the living God does not dwell in temples made with hands.*” That’s what Paul says.

You know, the living God had the wise man, the prophet writes this in **2 Chronicles 2:5**: “*Who is able to build him a house seeing the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him.*” Solomon, how can you build me a house? “*The heaven of heavens cannot contain me.*”

David said: “*Whether shall I go from thy spirit? If I ascend into heaven thou art there. If I make my bed in hell (the place of the dead), thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shalt thou hand hold me. Night shall be light about me.*” God doesn’t dwell in houses made with hands or temples made with hands.

Fourthly: **Verse 25**: “*Neither is the living God worshipped with men’s hands as though He needed anything from you.*”

God’s not worshipped with the material of men’s hands and the sacrifices of men’s hands and the prostration of men’s bodies. I hear preachers always saying; “Give God your talents and give God your tithes and give God your time, and give God this, that, and the other.”

We don’t give God anything. God doesn’t need anything. Listen to this again: “*Neither is the living God worshipped with men’s hands as though he needed anything from you. He giveth to all life and breath and all things.*” God stands in need of nothing. We stand in need of all things.

God is not worshipped with relics, statues, processions, and offerings. I hear people say, “Worship the Lord with your tithes and offerings.” You don’t worship God with gold and silver and fruits of your hands; God is worshipped in the heart by faith.

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You may give some of your income to preach the Gospel and to support missionaries and so forth but you don't worship God with these relics, with silver and gold, and material substance. He said; *"My son, give me your heart."*

Even the heart to worship God is the gift of God. We don't add anything to God. We don't contribute anything. You better listen to this. It would be a shame to go through life worshipping an unknown God, not knowing the living God.

And Paul is introducing Him here. He said: *"He made the heavens and all things."* He said, *"He dwells not in temples made with hands. He's Lord of heaven and of earth."*

He's not worshipped with the things of men's hands as though he needed anything. He's needs nothing. He gives. We receive from God. He receives nothing from us. He gives unto all life and breath and all things.

Now watch this, **verse 26**: *"And God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the earth."* We've seen this thing on television recently a story called, "Roots?" We all have common roots, the same roots; we all came from Adam.

We're all of the same blood. That's right; we have no cause to strive against one another. We have no cause to be proud or seek preeminence over one another. We have no cause to be lifted up. We all came from Adam. We all fell in Adam. We all sinned in Adam. *"God hath made of one blood all nations."*

Read on in **verse 26**: *"God hath determined the time and the habitation and the boundaries of all men."* God has determined the time of this earth. God has determined the time of every nation. God has determined the time and habitation and boundaries of all men.

And somebody said; "No man comes or leaves sooner or later than God decrees." God put you where you are according to His purpose. The Scripture says in **Job 14:5**: *"Seeing man's days are determined. The numbers of his months are with thee. Thou hast appointed his bounds; he cannot pass."*

God Almighty gives life to every man. He said; *"I create light and darkness and good and evil, life and death. The Lord killeth and the Lord maketh alive."*

I hear someone saying: "That's not my God." That's what I am saying and that's what Paul said to these people. Paul told them "I'm declaring unto you a God you don't know anything about. I'm declaring unto you the living God, the God of heaven, the God of creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Look at **verse 27**: *"Men should seek the living God."* They should, they won't, but they should. They should seek the living God in hope that they might find Him and know Him. He's not far from any of us: *"For in Him we live and move and have our being."*

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I draw that breath by the power of God. I raise this hand by the power of God. I can see by the grace of God. I can hear a voice by the grace of God. I have the strength to hold this Book by the grace of God. *“In Him I live and move and have my being.”* It shouldn't be hard to find Him, because in Him we live.

And then watch that next **verse 29**: *“For as much as we are the offspring of God.”* Created in the image of God; we ought not to think of God as silver, gold, idols, or the work of men's hands. We are the offspring of God. God created me in His image.

Oh I know I spoiled it and ruined it. Adam did and on down the line. But we still retain something of the image of God. If you will read the Bible you'll hear the Bible talk about the eye of God is in every place, *“God's ears not heavy that he cannot hear. His arm is not short that he cannot save.”*

It's talking about the heart of God and the mind of God and the will of God. Yes sir! We have a mind and a heart and a will and so does God. And why should you bow before a statue? You are the offspring of God and you're not a statue. Why should your God be a statue? Do you see what I am saying? We're His offspring, His creation.

Now, in verses **30 and 31** He says: *“The time of this ignorance God winked at.”* Not that God approved of it but God despised it. But He left people alone in their ignorance. He left them in their darkness.

Read it there in **verses 30 and 31**, *“But God (Almighty) has appointed a day; in which he shall judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained (Jesus Christ). And He hath given assurance and proof in that he raised him from the dead.”*

You say, “Can the living God be known?” Yes sir! How can He be known, in Christ? One of the disciples said to Him one day: *“Show us the Father. Show us the living God. Show us God.”* And Jesus Christ our Lord said, *“Phillip; have I been so long time with you, you don't know me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”*

Christ came down here not only to provide for us a perfect righteousness and a perfect redemption but to reveal God, that men might know God. *“He that hath seen me hath seen my Father. God hath appointed a day in which he is going to judge all men by that man whom he hath ordained, (Jesus Christ).”*

And He's given proof of it and assurance of it in that He did not leave Him in the grave but He raised Him from the tomb and He ascended to the right of the Father. Listen to **John chapter 20:31**: *“These are written, (all of this is written), that you might believe on the name of the Son of God and believing you might have life.”*

And then in **1 John 5:20**, I close: *“And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His*

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Son Jesus Christ, and this is the true God and this is eternal life, (to know God, whom to know is life eternal)."

May the Spirit of the living God be pleased to reveal to you and to me, to our hearts, not just to our head, the living God that we might fall down at His feet and cry with Thomas: *"My Lord and my God!"*