Knowing God

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Date: 19 September 2021

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[0:00] It says in Ephesians 1.23, God, whose breadth and length and height and depth are unfathomable, how can we possibly house Him? God does not live in man-made temples, nor is He served by human hands.

It says in verse 25, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. The Greeks served their gods by building temples and statues and altars and offering sacrifice to them and parading the idols throughout the city, carrying them around because they can't walk themselves.
But God declares that He is actually not served by human hands. This is an incredible assertion. There is nothing that God needs.
God says in Psalm 50, verse 12, that He doesn't need our sacrifices. He says, quote, if I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is mine and all that is in it.
The true God does not need to be carried from place to place by human servants. The true God does not need to be fed with sacrificial offerings by humans.
[1:14] There is no deficiency or insufficiency in God. God does not need to be fed with us. This is what we call the doctrine of divine aseity. God's self-existence.

His absolute independence. God did not create humanity because He needed us. Because He was insecure about Himself and needed our love and worship.
God didn't create us because He was shorthanded and needed some extra help. God created the world out of nothing.
And so our existence is totally, entirely derivative and dependent on Him. God is the only truly independent being in the universe.
He is totally independent. And we are totally dependent. God is the one who gives us life and breath and everything. God created us not to fill His emptiness, but out of His fullness.
[2:20] In order to diffuse His fullness. In order to display His glory. That's why God says in Isaiah 43, 7 that He created us for His glory.

So we have to be very careful, actually, when we talk about serving God. Of course, in one sense, as it says in 1 Thessalonians 1, 9, we have turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.
However, in another sense, we do not serve God at all. He's not served by human hands.
We do not serve God in any sense of contributing something that He Himself lacks. Are you working hard right now with blood, sweat, and tears to repay God for what He has done for you?
There is nothing to be repaid because salvation is a gift from God. It's not alone. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.
[3:39] Why, Christian brothers and sisters, do you live like Jesus came to be served by you? The gospel is not a service that you render to Jesus.

It's a service that Jesus has already rendered to you. Have you received this gift freely saying to God, Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.
Naked come to Thee for dress. Helpless look to Thee for grace. Are you trying to obey and serve God in your own strength?
As if it all depends on you. 1 Chronicles 29 verse 14 says, For all things come from you, and of your own we have given to you.
We can only give to God what we have received from Him. 2 Corinthians 9 verse 8 says, Do you notice the connection there?
[4:57] Every good work we do that we abound in is a result of God's abounding grace. This is why 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 10 to 11 says this, As each has received a gift, Use it to serve one

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another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies. In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. All that we do for God. That we do out of the gifts we have received from Him.
Out of His varied grace toward us. And so we ought to do everything with a conscious, prayerful dependence on Him. As those who have been united with Christ.
As Christ's mouth. As Christ's hands. As Christ's feet. So that in everything Christ gets the glory and not us. Genuine Christian service is never self-aggrandizing.
[6:11] It is always self-effacing. And Christ-exalting. Paul continues to magnify God in verse 26.

And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. Having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. God is the Lord of human history and world geography.
You were born exactly when you were born. And exactly where you were born. In accordance with God's sovereign will. We are all descended from one man.
A common ancestor, Adam. And God has sovereignly determined when in history and where on earth every nation should live. And He did this so that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him.
The word translated feel their way, it's a very good translation. It's to look for something in uncertain fashion. To feel around, to grope for something. Like a person trying to feel his way around the floor in a dark room.
[7:21] Paul is acknowledging here that the Athenians were in their own way seeking God. They're trying to feel their way toward Him. But they have not yet found Him.

And that's why Paul is now proclaiming to them the God that they worship as unknown. And this God is not in everything as the Stoics believed.
He's distinct from His creation and transcending over it. He is sovereign. And yet, God is not merely transcendent. He's not detached or aloof from us as the Epicureans conceived of God.
Paul says this in verses 27 and 28. Yet He is actually not far from us. For in Him we live and move and have our being as even some of your own poets have said. For we are indeed His offspring.
God is intimately involved in our lives. He knows what you are going through. He is present. He is imminent. He is watching.
[8:23] He's the one who is sustaining you so that you are still alive. So that you are still standing. He's the one who enables us to live and move and have our being.

I think a lot of times we live like we only need God in dire circumstances, don't we? God, please heal me of this disease.
God, please give me this job. Forgetting the fact that apart from God, we can't even do the basic things of life. God, we can't breathe.
We can't live. We can't move. We can't even exist. If we really understood this, we'd have a much humbler posture in our plans and activities.
And since God is the one who created us and sustains us in one sense, all of humanity can be described as God's offspring. Though not all of humanity is God's chosen children.
[9:28] Because we are all created in His image. And if we are God's offspring, then, Paul says, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

If we have been created by God, how can the objects of our creation be God? That's Paul's logic. Where did the idols and statues of gold, silver, and stone originate?
They are products of the human imagination, of human craftsmanship. How, then, can these things possibly be God? There's a world of difference between man-made gods that the Athenians worshipped and the God who made the world that Paul proclaimed.
In what ways are we also guilty of worshipping a God that we have fashioned with our own minds and hands? In what ways have we tried to domesticate God?
Reduce Him to amulets, pendants, and talismans? As if we can put God in a pocket and carry Him around like a trinket. In what ways have we compartmentalized our lives and acted like we can confine God, restrict Him and His demands to Sunday morning?

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[10:46] In what ways have we related to God like a genie that we turn to only when our own purposes and priorities are thwarted?

We must repent of our idolatry and turn to God on His terms. And remember, Paul was provoked in spirit by the numerous idols in Athens, and now Paul has established a Christian framework or worldview in which people can understand what he's saying.
And now he's exposing the futility of idolatry. But before I get to that next point, notice that while Paul's speech is chock full of biblical truths, he actually hasn't quoted a single Bible verse.
That's because unlike the Thessalonians and Bereans, Athenians were biblically illiterate Greeks.
So in verse 28, Paul quotes sources that the Athenians would have recognized as authoritative.
He says, Paul actually quotes from him again in Titus 1.12 from the exact same section, so this is likely to be a quote.
[12:10] And he says, To be sure, Paul's not endorsing all that they say. He's not simply affirming the Athenians' philosophical framework.

He's appropriating their works into the Christian framework and making his case against idolatry using what they themselves believed. He's using their frame of reference so that he might be more accessible and credible to the Athenians.
This is an effective way to evangelize with people who don't share a biblical context with us. To use what they already believe to expose, to contrast, to contradiction.
We exploit the points of contact to expose the points of contradiction. And that brings us to the final section of Paul's speech where he contrasts times of ignorance and times of repentance.
He says in verses 30 to 31, The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.
[13:21] And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. This is similar to what Paul said to the pagans in Lystra in Acts 14.16, when he said, He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

Prior to the coming of Jesus, the various nations were in times of ignorance, worshiping other gods, and God overlooked this. Not in the sense that he approved of it or pardoned their idolatry, but merely that he didn't interfere with it.
But now he commands all people everywhere to repent. With the coming of Jesus and the commissioning of his apostles, the times of ignorance have come to a decisive end.
Now God is interfering in the affairs of the nations. Now he is putting a stop to the idolatry all throughout the world, and he's sending his people to proclaim that.
And repentance, turning away from the idols, is a necessity because God has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.
[14:35] And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Whether we are aware of it or not, whether we like it or not, judgment day is coming. And every nation, every human being, will be held to an account for their idolatry.

The trial date has been set. It's fixed. When a judge is appointed, when a judge is assigned to a case, you know that the trial is near.
And the ultimate judge of humanity, Jesus has been appointed. And God has given proof of that by raising him from the dead.
That's why Jesus alone is qualified to judge both the living and the dead. Now some people criticize Paul's sermon here.
They say that, well, Paul doesn't actually preach the gospel. He doesn't talk about Jesus' death. He's only talking about the bad news of judgment. He doesn't talk about the good news.
[15:46] I don't think that's what's happening here. We see in verse 34 that some people had joined Paul and believed. Dionysius the Areopagite, Demaris, Demaris, and others with him.

The fact that they believed, meaning they became believers, they became Christians, showed that Paul did preach the good news that Jesus died and was raised for the forgiveness of sins. He said earlier in verse 8 that Paul was preaching Jesus, which is shorthand in the book of Acts for preaching the gospel.
That Jesus is the prophesied Messiah and Savior. After all, how do you preach the resurrection of Christ without preaching about the death of Christ?

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Paul writes in Romans 1, chapter 1, verse 4, that Jesus Christ, our Lord, was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.
It was the resurrection that demonstrated decisively that Jesus, the Son of Man, who died on the cross, was also the Son of God. We know that Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross on behalf of His people was accepted by the Father because He raised Jesus from the dead.
[17:08] That's how we know that. Friends, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We were all once proud and stubborn idolaters, convinced of the wisdom of our rebellious ways, devising gods and goddesses to our own liking, with our own minds and with our own hands, and prostrating ourselves before them, literally or at least figuratively, we have made idols in our own image rather than worshiping the God in whose image we have been created.

We have worshipped ourselves by making ourselves the ultimate object of our affection and allegiance, by living for ourselves and not for the God who created us.
But God, who should have rejected our folly and crushed our rebellion, instead graciously sent us His Son, who is the image of the invisible God.
so that we might turn from worshipping the images of our own making and turn to the living God.
We deserve to be destroyed by God's holy wrath for our idolatry, and it's only because Jesus was crushed in our place that we now have the opportunity to repent.
That's the good news of Jesus Christ. There are idols all over the world, all over our city.
[18:58] I pray that we be provoked in our spirit to proclaim the living God wherever we go.

Heavenly Father, help us to do that. Oh, so align our hearts with yours, Father.
So unite us with the will of our Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. That we can't help but be provoked by idolatry.
That we might bear witness to you the image of the invisible God, Lord Jesus, to the ends of the earth. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen. Amen.

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