

LET ME EXPLAIN TO YOU “The unknown God”

(Contributions by Jeff Strite)

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1. History records that:

- a. That the Assyrians,
- b. Babylonians,
- c. Phoenicians,
- d. Egyptians,
- e. Persians,
- f. Greeks,
- g. and Romans
- h. had their many gods

2. They had

- a. gods of war,
- b. gods of industry,
- c. gods of agriculture,
- d. gods of cities,
- e. gods of towns,
- f. and many others.

3. But in all of their galaxy of gods,

- a. there never was one called
 - i. “god of hope”
 - ii. or the “god of mercy”
 - iii. or the god of love”
- b. Those nations had numerous gods...
 - i. but they **didn't** have gods **who cared for them.**
- c. Their gods had to be
 - i. appeased
 - ii. and bribed not to harm them.

4. By contrast, one ancient scholar said:

“I have read from Plato and Cicero sayings that are very wise and beautiful; but I never read in either of them: ‘Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.’” Augustine of Hippo

Acts 17:13–34

“When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.”

5. According to our text in **Acts 17**...Paul was preaching in Athens,

- a. Athens was the intellectual center of the world.
- b. They had one of the greatest universities of that day.
- c. Their city was **a center of**
 - i. philosophy,

- ii. literature,
- iii. science
- iv. and art.

d. Some of the **greatest philosophers and thinkers** lived there:

- i. Euripides,
- ii. Plato
- iii. and Socrates

e. and it was here in Athens... where the idea of **Democracy took root**.

6. They also had **lots of gods... just like every other nation did**.

- a. Someone noted
 - i. *“that in Athens it was easier to find an idol than it was to find a man.”*
 - ii. It's estimated that they had **over 30,000 idols** in the city
 - iii. and just in case they missed one
 - 1. they had an idol to an **unknown god.**

7. 30,000 idols??? THAT'S A LOT OF GODS.

8. And **Acts 17:16** tells us that Paul's *“spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.”*

9. Paul, like (like Jews and Christians)

- a. knew that idols were essentially worthless.
- b. Not only did they **NOT** offer
 - i. mercy,
 - ii. hope
 - iii. or love
- c. they didn't offer anything else either.

Psalm 115:3–8

*“Our God is in heaven;
he does whatever pleases him.*

*But their idols are silver and gold,
made by the hands of men.*

*They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but they cannot see;
they have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but they cannot smell;
they have hands, but cannot feel,*

*feet, but they cannot walk;
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.
Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.”*

10. Their gods couldn’t

- a. say anything,
- b. do anything
- c. or go anywhere
- d. **without help.**

11. Essentially, anyone who worshipped these useless idols

- a. was foolish.

12. And the Psalm ends by saying

Verses 9–11

*“O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—
he is their help and shield.*

*O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—
he is their help and shield.*

*You who fear him, trust in the LORD—
he is their help and shield.”*

13. ” We, however, can count on our God.

- a. He will always be there for you!
- b. **Not** like those lifeless idols.

14. So here in Athens

- a. the **center of wisdom and learning**
 - i. in the ancient world
- b. the **place where the true intellectuals of the day lived**
- c. the city of Athens **had 30,000 of these worthless idols.**
- d. And now **Paul has been invited to preach** to these folks
 - i. at a place called the **Areopagus**
 - ii. a **place where** respected leaders and intellectuals
 - iii. would **gather** to discuss important matters.

15. I read that in Athens

- a. this was the classic confrontation

- i. of reason
- ii. and religion.
- b. **NO IT WASN'T!**
- c. This was the confrontation
 - i. of faith
 - ii. and foolishness.
- d. It was the confrontation
 - i. of the one true God
 - ii. against the graveyard
 - iii. of empty idolatry.

16. Now Paul knew that you **never get a 2nd chance** to make a 1st impression,

- a. So, Paul doesn't start by
 - i. insulting
 - ii. or demeaning
 - iii. his audience.
- b. **Instead**, he says "*I can see you are a very religious people.*"
- c. And he was right... they've got like 30,000 idols.

17. But then he said something like this: "*You know I couldn't help but notice that you had one idol to an unknown god. So, let me tell you about Him.*"

And then he says:

Acts 17:24–26

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."

18. The Athenians considered themselves **superior to everybody else**.

- a. Everyone who **wasn't** like them
 - i. was a foreigner
 - ii. and were subjected
 - 1. to discrimination
 - 2. and mistreatment.
- b. Other folks just **weren't** worth their time.
- c. Athens believed that their gods (all 30,000) **favored THEM**,
- d. and so they believed **they were superior to everyone else**.

19. Consider our world today

- a. How many religions serve false gods

- i. Eastern Religions

- 1. Buddha
 - 2. Hindu
 - 3. Zoraster
 - 4. Confucious

- ii. Western Religions

- 1. Money
 - 2. Power
 - 3. Influence
 - 4. Race (skin color)

Ephesians 5:5–7

“For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”

20. We may not have all the statues Athens had

- a. But our idols today carry the same influence over people

- i. As the idols of Athens day

- b. How familiar does this sound – relating to our Western World:

2 Timothy 3:1–5

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholly, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”

- c. It's all Idolatry

21. So, when you walk around your corner of the world

- a. **What stirs you?**

- b. Does the Spirit prompt you

- i. To do anything
 - ii. about what you see?

22. Imagine **what** the Apostle Paul would **say**

- a. If he walked in your work place

- b. Or walked in your neighborhood

- c. Listened to the conversations
 - i. with people you surround yourself with

23. And I'm **not** just talking about the people in your secular world

- a. How about the **people you go to church with**
- b. Are the conversations they have with each other
 - i. **No** different than what the people
 - ii. In the secular world talk about
- c. When was the last time someone in your church
 - i. Asked you about what you are studying in the Bible?
 - ii. How your personal Bible Study is impacting your life?
 - iii. What changes have you made resulting from your Bible Study?
 - iv. Or even challenged you on your consistency in prayer?
- d. Or do they converse about
 - i. Job
 - ii. Vacations
 - iii. Family (how the kids are doing in school)
 - iv. Great restaurants to visit
 - v. Home repairs you are making
 - vi. Worldly Conversations
- e. **Not** that these are evil conversations
 - i. **But is there genuine Spiritual Conversations**
 - ii. Taking place

24. **Sadly**, our churches have drifted away into **worldliness**

- a. Churches we once considered Hallmark Churches
- b. Churches leading the way to restoring New Testament Christianity
- c. **Are now no different than:**
 - i. the Baptist churches
 - ii. Grace churches
 - iii. Bayside churches
 - iv. AND even the Catholic Churches
- d. The title: **NON-DENOMINATIONAL**
 - i. **Means absolutely nothing** today
 - ii. It only means that they **don't subscribe**
 - 1. To denominational affiliations

25. Sadly, though they have missed the mark on DOCTRINE

a. They tend to be more spiritual in their fellowship

- i. Than the Churches of Christ
- ii. And the other churches

1. coming out of the Restoration Movement of the 1800's

26. So, the Question for us this morning is"

a. What kind of church do we want to be?

b. Not so much what we are right now

- i. But where do we want to move towards
- ii. What would people say

1. When they reference our church

c. Are we going to be different from the world?

d. If the Apostle Paul were to walk into our fellowship

i. What would he say?

1. Would he look around and see the idolatry of the Western world

2. Represented in our Today's version of Christianity

"I can see that you are religious

But let me tell you about your unknown god"

27. Brothers and sisters

a. LET US RETURN TO NEW TESTAMENT CONVICTIONS

Romans 12:2

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"

i. See the world as lost

and in need of a Savior

ii. Build a fellowship

that is spiritually based

b. Where we

Colossians 3:16–17

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH DO WE WANT TO BE?