

Acts 17:22-31 NIV

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People 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. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what 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 human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any 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 human 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 everyone by raising him from the dead.”

AN UNKNOWN GOD 17 May 2020

Do you worship an unknown God? Or do you worship a number of 'gods'? Or do you have a personal relationship with God through the one man who made all the nations – Jesus Christ?

Our Scripture this morning is set at a place called Mars Hill or Areopagus – hills of Ares who was a Greek god of war. A council, by the same name, would meet on Mars Hill where questions of morals and rights were asked of teachers who lectured in public.

Thus when Paul started to preach in public they placed him on trial along with Christianity. But Paul turned this around to challenge their philosophies.

The city of Athens in Bible days attracted a lot of “sight-seers”. The Greeks were famous for their art, sculptures, architecture, etc. But Paul didn't go as a sight-seer but rather as a soul-winner. When he arrived his heart was broken to see the city immersed in a cultural paganism of idolatry.

Historians tell us that in those days the Greeks worshipped as many as 30 gods and goddesses in their mythology. They were make-believe gods, but they took them very seriously. They would erect statues and monuments and altars to them. The streets were lined with these gods, and it has been said that it was easier to find a god than a man.

They were afraid that they had perhaps even missed some gods, so they erected an altar to “the unknown god.”

They didn't want to sleight any unknown god, making him angry...they wanted to be open-minded to others who may come to the area and not find "their" god represented. Why was this? There has been 600 years before a terrible pestilence fell on the city, with nothing to halt it.

Paul knew these were false gods...this was demonic...he knew that wood and stone couldn't save a person's soul. Paul was up against a lot. Paul took their ignorance and superstitions, to introduce them to the true and Living God.

Here in the midst of dozens of pagan temples, gods and goddesses, Paul shows them that in this world there is only one that is the true God, worthy of our worship. He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Certainly this was a new concept for them to have of a deity. So Paul started where they were...he went to them, and used a clever opening line in saying I notice that you are aware that there's a god you don't know...I wanna talk to you about Him!

Now I wonder what Paul would see if he came to Australia today – what shrines, altars and idols would he witness us worshipping? Would he see the number of churches and places of worship almost empty or even closed?

Perhaps the only difference between our society today and that of ancient Athens, is that we do not need to have an image of stone or wood to bow down to. We can bow down to an image that has been electronically placed into our minds appealing to our desires.

Sit down some evening for dinner and watch three or four hours of TV programs, as well as the commercials. Those shows as well as the advertisements will reveal many of the gods our society bows down to today. There are the gods of pleasure, of physical beauty, there are gods of prominence, power, wealth, sex, the god of self-worship, and perhaps other things as well.

Today the question is the same for us as it was for Paul – how do we engage with each other – family, friends, neighbours, agnostics and atheists?

So we can learn from how Paul went about it. He was well prepared. Like Paul, we must be prepared. We can't wait until we feel we are adequately prepared because this can take a lifetime.

But, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through reading and learning more about the Bible, what it means and how to apply it to life, our words will be convincing to others. For any good communication or discussion to occur we can't jump in, like a bull at a gate, what they call Bible bashing.

Paul did not begin by reciting Jewish history for this would have been meaningless to his Greek audience. Note what he did – he began by using examples that they understood. By understanding their religious behaviour. He even included some of the ancient poet's statements, which his audience recognized.

Paul established common ground by emphasizing what they agreed on about God. He then moved his message to the person of Christ, centering on the Resurrection.

In the past God overlooked such ignorance. Now He commands all people everywhere to repent. It is one thing to worship a false and man-made god out of ignorance. But now through the teaching and preaching of the Apostle Paul and the revelation of God that is in the hearts of men there is no excuse to ignore God. God has appointed a day when He will judge all the world with justice through Jesus Christ. Once Jesus Christ came into this world as the physical human presence of God Almighty, man was left without an excuse.

Scripture affirms that in Jesus the Christ, that we have come into the presence of God, or perhaps more correctly that God has come into our presence. The proof of the judgment is the resurrection of Christ.

God is the God of creation This is where we have to begin...who created it all. If you're wrong on this 1st point you'll be wrong on everything which follows that. Like an algebra equation...if the first number is wrong, everything following it will be...don't even bother continuing the rest of the problem.

God is the God of personal involvement This really flew in the face of Greek mythology. They thought of their gods as being far away, having little to do w/ mankind, not wanting to be troubled by man. But God is right here in my heart and in your heart. And He Who is the Creator didn't just make it all and then turn His back on it...He's personally involved down to the hairs on our heads, or in the drain!

God knows our name John 10:3 The guard who is posted to protect the sheep opens the gate for the shepherd and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

God knows our needs **Philippians 4:19** Know this, my God will also fill every need you have according to His glorious riches in Jesus, the anointed, our Liberating King.

God knows how you feel. **Hebrews 4:15** For Jesus is not some high priest who has no sympathy for our weaknesses, and flaws. He has already been tested in every way that we are tested; but He emerged victorious, without failing God.

God is the God of repentance We should never make the mistake of thinking we have gotten away with sin. Just because judgment hasn't come yet for something doesn't mean it won't come. Lost people shouldn't be duped into thinking that because they haven't seen hell that it doesn't exist, either!

God is the God of judgment Many stand in our courts today with hatred toward the judge, or after court go away in bitterness, but his decision stands! God, as the Almighty creator, has the right to judge us and He will do this justly and fairly.

If you are listening today feeling discouraged, God knows, and wants to lift you up. Depressed? God wants to cheer you up. Feeling spiritually low? God wants to raise you up! God knows how you feel...and furthermore...God cares!

Ever felt rejected? He's been there! Physically worn out? He's been there! Disappointed in others? Burdened?

He who was the bread of life began His ministry hungry.

He who was the water of life ended His ministry thirsty.

He who was weary is our rest.
He who paid taxes is the king of the universe.
He who was called a devil cast out demons.
He who prayed hears our prayers.
He who wept dries our tears.
He who was sold for 30 pieces of silver redeemed the world.
He who was led as a lamb to the slaughter is our Good Shepherd.
He's a personal God!

I remember when I was little and my parents would clean the church every Friday evening. Moreland Church of Christ had an upper room and sometimes mum would send me upstairs to dust. Now I am sure some of you may have seen the image of Jesus looking straight at Peter with the saying – Jesus looked upon Peter, and Peter remembered. Well the picture had Jesus' eyes looking like they were looking right at me. As a child it made me feel uncomfortable so I would often not want to go up there. But as I grew, I began to love that picture as I now know that Jesus eyes were telling me that He loves me so much, He can't keep His eyes off me!"