

December 15, 2013

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (Part III)
Knowing the UNKNOWN God
Acts 17: 22-30

Let me remind you. **We are** studying a series of messages on WHY it is vital for us to understand a term in the scriptures called TROG. **What** is TROG?

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (TROG) is the MOST important (single) piece of information sinners need to know and understand because: **TROG** is the ONLY thing that identifies and declares to sinners **THE UNKNOWN GOD**.

Look AT 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. 23 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.”

Paul says to these philosophers here on Mars Hill that I am declaring to you the God that you obviously (admittedly) do not know, although HE keeps us all.

Look at Acts 17: 24-28 “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; 25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: 28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”

Even when we don’t know God, He is still the One keeping us. **Our** ignorance of the God who is keeping us is evident.

Look at Acts 17: 29-30 “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:”

“**God** winked atö does NOT mean God treated it LIGHTLY. It MEANS that God did not ADDRESS their öignoranceö. He did not CONFRONT the idolatry of the Gentiles. He left them alone. He left them in their ignorance. He left them in their idolatry. Under the Old Covenant, He taught Israel, and left the önationsö to themselves. No schoolmaster. No law. No prophets. No pictures and types.

The ötimes of this ignorance” are times that are common to all without exception. We don’t know it. So, we can’t acknowledge it. But, UNTIL God brings us to the Gospel and TROG, He is to ALL of us öthe UNKNOWN Godö.

Now, the concept (idea) of NOT knowing God is FOREIGN to us all by nature. The idea that God is UNKNOWN to us is unthinkable. It has never even crossed our minds. Every religious sinner THINKS they know God. Every religious sinner THINKS they worship God. But, that thinking is CONTRARY to the scriptures. Look at some scriptures that vividly and plainly REFUTE our natural thinking on this issue.

Look at Ephesians 2: 1-3 “**And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;**

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

This is written to regenerated/converted sinners. It is describing their conversation BEFORE the Spirit’s work in them. “**You** were deadö, etc. **You** be the judge. Does that sound like sinners who know and are worshipping the God of the scriptures? Look further on in that same context, Ephesians 2: 11-12 “**Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That AT THAT TIME ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”**

It is easy for us to look at passages like this and think, öThose Gentiles were some ignorant and obvious idolatersö. But, remember back in Ephesians 2, Paul had

already said, “Among whom WE ALL had our conversation. **And**, ALL were by nature children of wrath.” **He is** addressing us ALL by nature.

God’s indictment is against ALL fallen humanity (Jews, Gentiles, God’s elect, ALL). Look at Romans 3: 10-11 “**As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”**

Look at the bottom line of that indictment, Romans 3: 18 “**There is no fear of God before their eyes.”**

These passages are describing ALL of us by nature. **ALL** are spiritually dead. **NONE** of us know God. **NONE** are worshipping God. **NONE** are seeking after God. **NONE** of us understand God’s way of salvation through Christ alone. **ALL** are ignorant of TROG. **And**, the God of the Scriptures is UNKNOWN to us AT THIS TIME.

Let me share one more context in Isaiah that had an impact on my thinking early on under the Gospel.

Look at Isaiah 45: 20 “**Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save.”**

I knew that I had never carved out an image of wood or stone and worshipped that image. **But**, I also knew that the God I was seeing in the Gospel was NOT the “god” I saw in my former religion. I learned (under the Gospel) that I had “**pray(ed) unto a god that cannot save”**.

You see, if you have imagined a “god” who saved, accepted or blessed you on ANY basis OTHER than the imputed righteousness of Christ, you (too) have “**pray(ed) unto a god that cannot save”**. **And**, we have all have done that by nature.

It is in this context (Isaiah) that God tells us who to look to. **He** declares unto us the ONE thing that identifies and DISTINGUISHES God from idols of this world. **God** is (not) DISTINGUISHED in creation. **He is** (not) DISTINGUISHED in providence. **But**, He (is) DISTINGUISHED in salvation by Christ ALONE.

Look at Isaiah 45: 21-22 “**Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.**

22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

The God who is just to justify ungodly sinners on the basis of Christø's imputed righteousness alone is the God who is ALWAYS set before sinners in the Gospel. **But**, UNTIL then, He is the God who is UNKNOWN to us by nature.

That is what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. **Look** at I Corinthians 1: 18 “**For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.**

The Gospel is always delivered to two groups of sinners (those who are õperishingö and those who are õbeing savedö). **It is** (and remains) õfoolishnessö to the one. **But**, it BECOMES õthe power of Godö to the other. **Your** response to THE Gospel reveals which group you are in.

Look on at I Corinthians 1: 19-20 “**For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.**

20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

The õworldö in all its (religious) õwisdomö does not (CANNOT) bring a sinner face to face with the God of the Scriptures. **The** õworldø's wisdomö is, õGod will save you IF____. **The** message of this worldø's religion is God will, IF you will. **Any** message that fails to reveal TROG is NOT: **the** Gospel; **declaring** to sinners the God of the Scriptures; **able** to bring sinners to salvation.

God's wisdom is that He has saved a multitude of His choosing based on Christø's work ALONE (all efforts of sinners excluded). **The** Gospel (alone) CONFRONTS sinners with the õgodö of this worldø's religion versus the God who saves and eternally blesses sinners on the basis of Christø's imputed righteousness ALONE.

God IS the true and living God. **He** IS a just God and Savior. **But**, God is only IDENTIFIED; **He** is only DISTINGUISHED; **we** only learn of HIM under the Gospel, õwherein TROG is revealedö.

Under my former religion, (just like those with whom I worshipped), I THOUGHT I knew God. **I** was ZEALOUS. **I** was SINCERE. **I** was DEDICATED. **I**

THOUGHT I worshipped God. **I THOUGHT** I was trusting Christ alone for salvation. **But**, I was really trusting my **FAITH** in Christ, and not His death **ALONE**.

I knew NOTHING of the God who declares sinners righteous on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness alone. **I was** ðungodlyö. I was like Ephesians 2: 12, "**without hope and without God in this world**". **I was** like Isaiah, "**A man of unclean lips dwelling amongst a people of unclean lips.**" **But**, **THAT** is who God sends His Gospel to (ðungodlyö, yet, zealous religionists who do not know the God of the scriptures).

Initially, the Gospel is delivered to ðungodlyö sinners. **Ungodly** means ð destitute of reverential awe towards God. **It means** the same thing as ð no fear of God. **It** covers the unconcerned, the lawless, the perverse. **They** are most certainly **WITHOUT** God. **They** are most certainly ðungodlyö.

But, ðungodlyö also includes the sincere, dedicated religionist, who has no regard for God's redemptive glory (how God is just to justify). **It covers** the dedicated religionist who (like me) was "**praying to a god who could not save**".

And, being ðungodlyö is **FAR** from a good thing. **The** ðungodlyö are headed for eternal misery. (Psalm 1: 6). "**The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment.**" "**The way of the ungodly will perish.**"

But, thankfully, God shows mercy to the ðungodlyö. **And**, that mercy reaches all the way back to eternity (where God justified the ðungodlyö).

Look at Romans 4: 5 "**But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.**"

This is spoken of Abraham. ð **To him** that works, his reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt.ö **Abraham** believed that God had justified him (i.e. declared him righteous) on the basis of the righteousness Christ would establish at the Cross. ð **Abraham** rejoiced to see my day (the day of Christ) and was glad.ö

God's mercy toward the ðungodlyö was seen at the Cross, where Christ died for the ðungodlyö. **Look** at Romans 5: 6 "**For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.**"

Christ came to save sinners. **He** died, the Just for the unjust.

God's mercy to the öungodlyö is seen IN TIME when the Holy Spirit regenerates (i.e. imparts spiritual life) to the öungodlyö.

Look at John 1: 11-13 **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.**

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Regeneration is the work of the Spirit IN sinners. **And**, Regeneration is where the God who is (previously) UNKNOWN is made KNOWN. **This** is when the öungodlyö are delivered from their öungodlinessö. **I. e.** Regeneration is where the minds of those who have NO REGARD for God's glory in salvation are CHANGED to regard God's glory in salvation as paramount/of utmost importance.

This is where God öshinesí ...ö (II Corinthians 4: 6). **The** elect are öungodlyö (I.e. WITHOUT God, not KNOWING God, not WORSHIPPING God) until the Spirit gives them life and faith in the God who justifies the ungodly based on the imputed righteousness of Christ ALONE.

SOMETHING outside ourselves; **something** apart from OUR obedience, MUST make it right for God to save us, keep us, and eternally bless us. **SOMETHING** must make it right for the Spirit of God to impart spiritual life to us. Until we know that that SOMETHING is THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, we don't know God.

NONE know God by nature. **He is** to ALL (even His elect) öthe UNKNOWN Godö. Yet, God knows His people. **And**, His people WILL know Him.

Christ prayed that His people be given life and knowledge of God through Him.

Look at John 17: 1-3 **“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:**

2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Christ's people WILL all be taught of God. Look at Hebrews 8: 11-12 **“And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.**

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”

God’s people will all be taught of God. **They** will be delivered from the counsel of the ungodly. **They** will be brought under the sound of God’s Gospel. **The Spirit** of God will impart life to them. **They** will be given faith to look to Christ. **And**, those who LEARN will come to Christ.

Look at John 6: 45 “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

These will not come to Christ to accept Him as their personal savior. **They** won’t come to add their faith to His death, and thereby save themselves from sin. **All** that thinking is unscriptural. **Those** are things that God’s people will repent of.

But, these will come TO CHRIST, the God-man, whose obedience unto death upheld God’s STANDARD of judgment and established righteousness in the earth. **They** will come TO CHRIST who put away the sin of His people. **They** will come TO CHRIST whose righteousness imputed alone enables God to justify them and bless them with all spiritual blessings.

I would ask every sinner who claims to have come to Christ, have you come to the One whose death ALONE has saved EVERY sinner He died for? **Have** you come to the God you did not KNOW apart from TROG revealed in the Gospel?

A man might say, I KNOW God by His creation. **You** MIGHT believe that there is a God who created. **Yet**, you CANNOT know the God who did the creating by His creation. **You** might believe that God is COMPLETE control of things. **But**, the only way to KNOW the God who is in COMPLETE control of things is for HIM to reveal Himself.

And, God has chosen to reveal and DISTINGUISH Himself through the Person and Work of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Look at Matthew 11: 25-26 “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

These statements come on the heels of Christ upbraiding those cities who saw His greatest miracles, yet, refused to believe on Him and repent. **As we** saw before, the öwise and prudentö of the world have an öIDEAö of God that is foreign to the scriptures. **The ONLY** way sinners know God is thru the Son He sent.

Look at Matthew 11: 27 “**All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.**”

If you would know öthe Fatherö, (i.e. if you would know the God of the scriptures), that knowledge must come through the Son. **UNTIL** the Son reveals Him, He remains the UNKNOWN God.

Look at Philippians 3: 7-9 “**But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.**

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom **I have suffered the loss of all things**, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 ¶ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:”

Paul is saying here that EVERYTHING He öthoughtö He knew about God changed when he came to the knowledge of what Christ had done to save His people from their sins. **When** he says, “**I have suffered the loss of all things**”, he is including all his thoughts of God as a Savior BEFORE God stopped him on the road to Damascus.

When ANY sinner thinks ANYTHING is gaining them Godø favor OTHER THAN the imputed righteousness of Christ ALONE, that sinner (at that time) is not looking to the God of the scriptures. **He/she** does not know a Just God and Savior. **He/she** does not know (Is not trusting) Jesus Christ öwhom God has sentö. **Have** you (have I) ever thought anything ELSE was gaining or maintaining our favor with God?

Our next subject in this series of messages will be Godly Repentance. **Having** brought sinners to the Gospel (and face to face with a Just God and Savior); **having** taught sinners of the God who is UNKNOWN to us by nature; **having** done that, God NOW commands all men everywhere to REPENT. **REPENT** of your FORMER idolatry. REPENT of your ödead worksö. **But**, that command will have relevance ONLY to those who have CHANGED Gods. **It will** have relevance ONLY to those who have embraced the UNKNOWN God; **only** to those willing to leave their idol.

Like Paul did to those on Mars Hill, I have set before you the UNKNOWN God. Some scoffed at Paul's God. **Others** wanted to hear more. **My** question for you in closing is, "Which crowd are you in?" **Most** resent the idea that they don't know God until TROG revealed in the Gospel makes Him known. **But**, that is God's testimony.

by **Mark Pannell**