

The One True God Is Inescapable

Acts 17:27-34; Romans 2:12

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The Lord God Almighty, Creator, Provider, and Savior, is inescapable. Those who deny Him or doubt Him cannot help but running into Him (as it were) wherever they go and whatever they do. They might as well try to escape and avoid the air that surrounds them as to try to escape or avoid the one true living God revealed in creation and revealed in Holy Scripture. You might as well take a fish out of water and expect it to survive as to take a human being out of the atmosphere of the Lord's omnipresence and expect him/her to survive; for in the Lord God we all live, move, and have our being.

It is the fool that says in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1). But his foolishness in denying God begins by saying, "No, God" (or "Not now, God") to God's revelation in nature, and "No, God" ("Not now, God") to God's revelation in Scripture. When we will not say, "Yes, God", and will not say, "O Lord, I believe, and love, and will obey what thou has revealed", God will give us over to our own unbelief to the point that we will even deny that God exists or will construct a god of our own imagination. In either case (to deny the Lord God or to reconstruct a new God in our own image), the end is the same—we will stand before the one true living God whom we have denied in order to be judged by Him for our refusal to submit ourselves in faith to the God who has made Himself known by revelation within us and all around us and especially by revelation in the gospel of grace found in Scripture.

We continue today Paul's defense before the Areopagus in making known to them the one true living God they did not know, trust, love, obey, or worship. The main points from our text are the following: (1) The One True God Is Inescapable (Acts 17:27-29); (2) The One True God Commands All to Repent (Acts 17:30-31); (3) The Different Responses to the One True God (Acts 17:32-34).

I. The One True God Is Inescapable (Acts 17:27-29).

A. As we resume Paul's defense of the Christian faith before the Areopagus (i.e. the court in Athens entrusted with examining new teachings with which they were unfamiliar), let us briefly review Paul's discourse thus far.

1. Paul first revealed to these "wise" Greek philosophers that an altar they had built to "THE UNKNOWN GOD" did not demonstrate their knowledge, but actually demonstrated their ignorance of that which they worshipped. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

2. Paul then makes known to the "wise" of this world the one true living God whom they did not know. Paul takes their publicly acknowledged ignorance of THE UNKNOWN GOD, and introduces them to one true living God whom they did not know. This God is:

- a. The God who created all.
- b. The God who rules over all.
- c. The God who is everywhere.
- d. The God who is self-sufficient.
- e. The God who provides for all.
- f. The God who is sovereign over all (having sovereignly determined from all

eternity the appointed times and boundaries of every nation and every person within that nation).

B. This same God who is revealed within our very nature (Romans 1:19), and is revealed all around

us in that which He has created (Romans 1:20), holds it forth as their duty (and ours) to seek Him alone—not some figment of their own imagination (Acts 17:27). They may be very religious, but it has not led them to know the one true God, but to greater ignorance of Him.

1. The fact that the Gentiles only felt and groped for God as in a dark room in their ignorant search for Him reveals the curse of God that had fallen upon mankind for sin. Their feeling and groping for God is not due to the lack of clarity of God's revelation to every single person. It is we that are at fault for the darkness that has blinded our eyes to the revelation of God. It is sin in Adam and our own personal sin that brings God's judgment of darkness. By nature all men hate the light of God's revelation and rather love their darkness and ignorance (John 3:19). We by nature hate the light because it exposes our sin and unbelief in the Lord God, and we love the darkness because it hides and buries our sin in ignorance and unbelief. There is a glimmer of light in each of our hearts (like a light shining through a small crack in a very dark room). But rather than pounding on the door for the light in the other room to be given to us, we content ourselves with seeking just that minimum of light—we don't want to see how sinful and filthy we really are in the sight of the Lord.

2. So the efforts of the Gentiles who were without God's Word (and are efforts as well) to seek God are all self-serving, so that we can feel good about ourselves that we are at least groping for God, that we are trying to find Him. But no man sincerely and truly seeks after God in order to know the glorious God as Creator, Provider, and Savior (Romans 3:10-11). So the light that we have from within ourselves and all around us is not sufficient light to save the Gentiles or us (we need the light of the gospel), but it is sufficient light to make us accountable before the Most Holy God (Romans 2:12).

3. Even when the Gentiles groped around in their darkness preferring to see the light of God's revelation through the crack in the door rather than the light of God's full revelation, God was not far away from them—nor is He far away from any sinner (Acts 17:27). Just how close is God to all mankind (even to pagans that have never heard of Jesus Christ)? Paul declares to the Areopagus in so many words that God is inescapable: (1) He is everywhere. (2) He has made us.

C. **God is inescapable—He is everywhere** ("For in him we live, and move, and have our being" Acts 17:28). Paul says in effect, the one true living God revealed within us and revealed all around us, is as close as the very air we breathe. For as we live, move, and have our being in the air around us (though not from the air), so to a far greater extent and degree we all live, move, and have our being in the omnipresence of our glorious God.

1. Neither nature nor man is God (as the Stoics believed who were pantheists). We are finite and limited and distinct from God who is infinite and is everywhere and who alone gives us our existence, provides what we need to live, and gives us the ability to move here and there to obtain what we need to live. Paul declares to the Greek philosophers in the Areopagus that the one true living God who is unknown to them is nevertheless inescapable—far more than even the air that you breathe.

2. It is only our sin and unbelief that blinds us to God all around us. Our heart will not beat without God. Our lungs will not breathe without God. We will be no more than an immovable rock or an unreasonable beast or cease to exist altogether without God.

3. Almighty God transcends and is infinitely greater than His creation—He cannot be bound by His creation (Isaiah 46:5). And yet He is immanent and present within His creation (near to us all). He is God with us (Immanuel—in the most notable sense in Jesus Christ, who dwelt among us—The Word became flesh and dwelt among us).

4. As we breathe in and breathe out the air that is all around us, so prayer and communion is breathing in and breathing out the God who surrounds us. The truth that God is inescapable is a means to our sanctification (we sin in His presence and we cannot outrun Him) and is a means to our comfort (we are never alone even when we cannot feel Him or sense Him—His truth is not fake news—though our feelings

may very well be fake news).

D. God is inescapable—He made us (“For we are his offspring” Acts 17:29).

1. We all bear the image and characteristics of our Creator, for we were made in His image. We who have been created by God cannot escape the God who made us (though we may run, deny, ignore, and disbelieve Him—for we were made in the image of God—not in a bodily image (God is Spirit), but in a spiritual image. The first man and woman were created in God’s image in knowledge of God and His will, in righteousness in doing the will of God, in holiness and being consecrated to God, and in dominion over the creatures in ruling on behalf of God over creation. And though sin has corrupted that image of God in man, sin has not altogether destroyed all trace of that image of God in man. That is why God is inescapable to all men—all men are made in His image. God is (if you will) in their very DNA. And when men profess to deny God’s existence—they profess to deny their own existence.

2. How does evolution account for the moral nature within us wherein people have an inherent sense that certain acts are right and contrary acts are wrong? Does a rock care about murder or stealing? Is an atom or molecule religious? If we consist of only a material and physical nature, where do laws of rationality and morality (which cannot be seen or touched) come from? They come from our Creator who has given to us not only a material body, but an immaterial soul that is inherently religious, that gropes for Him in ignorance, and that has this inborn moral nature that is not present in the rest of creation.

3. Paul appeals to their own pagan poets (Epimenides and Aratus), who likewise understood that even their pagan gods were inescapable (Acts 17:28). Paul’s appeal here is not to identify the one true living God with the pagan gods, but is rather to show forth that even their own pagan poets had light to recognize a basic truth in itself—God is inescapable (in him we live, move, and have our being; and we are his offspring). Paul had studied the pagan philosophers and poets, not for entertainment, but for ammunition to be used against them. Paul shames the Areopagus in showing that even their own idolatrous poets have given the same testimony and have affirmed that universal principle: God is inescapable: (1) in Him we live, move, and have our being (Epimenides); (2) we are his offspring (Aratus). God is inescapable. You might as well try to escape the air all around you. God is inescapable. You might as well try to escape who you are as to escape who made you.

4. Because God is everywhere and has made us, how sacrilegious to bring the Almighty God down to the level of the creation by man-made images and representations of Him (Acts 17:29). This does not exalt God or teach him who cannot read about the Almighty God, but rather lies and deceives us about the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit that God is in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

a. The objection is offered that if there were cameras at the time that Christ lived, photos could have been taken of Him—so how could it be a sin to draw Christ?

b. But that is the very point. God did not bring His Son into the world at a time when there were cameras. We never read of a portrait of Christ by the apostles or by any of the disciples. How do you place in some representation the glory of the only begotten of the Father—full of grace and truth (John 1:14)? Every picture of Jesus Christ is a lie—they are the vain imaginations of man.

c. This is also why God condemns all innovations of man that we bring into worship to be a graven image of our own imagination. If God has not authorized it in His Word, then we are making graven images after what pleases us to bring rather than what pleases God who has created us, provided for us, and saved us.

5. We are the offspring of God by adoption and not by creation alone. We are the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

II. The One True God Commands All to Repent (Acts 17:30-31).

A. Paul now sets forth the general ignorance of the Lord God of creation and providence found among the Gentile nations prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ and of the apostles not in order to excuse them for their ignorance, but to make clear that now that God has revealed His Son to mankind as the gospel is advancing throughout the world and into all nations, there is a greater aggravation of the sin of ignorance, unbelief, and idolatry.

B. What does Paul mean when he declares, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at”?

1. One thing for certain is that it cannot mean that God winks at and overlooks sin (as if sin is for a time ok with Him). God’s moral nature, which is absolutely holy, can never tolerate sin in some approving manner (Habakkuk 1:3). All sin must receive just payment (either from the sinner or from Christ).

2. God did not wink at the sin of the pagan Gentiles, but overlooked their ignorance for a time in not sending immediate judgment upon them all for their ignorance and the darkness of their idolatry and unbelief of the one true living God. However, it is undeniable that God judged Gentile nations for their idolatry and wickedness in the Old Testament period (God speaking through the prophets says, “I” bring this judgment upon these pagan nations): Sodom and Gomorrah, Assyria, Babylon, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Moab, Edom, Ammon. God was longsuffering to the idolaters who lived before the coming of Jesus Christ in not righteously judging and destroying them all at the same time as they deserved (Acts 14:16—God did not restrain their idolatry). God is longsuffering with the sin of man though He hates it—He does not tolerate our sin or reluctantly accept it as the norm (Romans 2:4). Without the grace of God, the pagans that lived before Christ continued to live on borrowed time, awaiting the Day of Judgment.

3. What is important to realize here is that no one is saved on account of his ignorance or saved by living up to the light that he/she has received by way of natural revelation (Romans 2:12). Salvation is by grace through faith in God’s Mediator for sin. Ignorance of God and His commandments is no excuse for sin; for people sin against the light that God has given to them—no one perfectly lives up to the light God has given to him/her (Romans 3:23). If people are saved on account of their ignorance, then Jesus should have left people in their ignorance rather than sending the apostles forth with the gospel which they could then disbelieve and reject. If ignorance saves us, I should stop preaching and you should stop listening because ignorance is bliss and is your salvation. Dear ones, ignorance is culpable (is our fault) because God says that as sinners, we love our darkness and our ignorance (John 3:19). We don’t want the light to expose our sin and our need of God’s salvation. That was true of the pagans before Christ, and it is true of us all by nature. Apart from the grace of God in opening our heart to the light of the gospel and granting to us faith in Jesus Christ, we will all be content to live in ignorance and enjoy our darkness in feeling good that we are continual seekers, groping around for the Lord.

C. Paul now presses the Areopagus to take action with regard to the truth they have heard concerning the God of whom they were ignorant—repent—not a suggestion, but a command. Your life depends upon it (Acts 17:30).

1. Call your ignorance sin. Call your idolatry the transgression of God’s Law.

2. Dear ones, when the gospel is preached, when God’s Word is taught, you cannot remain neutral in your response to it. Either you receive it by faith and humble yourselves before the Lord, or you reject it (even if you don’t say so you’re rejecting it). To think that you can walk the fence is man-inspired foolishness, not God-inspired wisdom. Walking the fence in regard to the truth of Jesus Christ is walking against Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:30). If we do not deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, we cannot be His disciples (Matthew 16:24).

D. Paul proclaims that repentance is necessary because an appointed day of judgment is coming when they will face the resurrected Jesus Christ (of whom they were ignorant). Don’t continue in your

ignorance, because your ignorance will not be tolerated when you stand before the resurrected Jesus Christ whom I now declare unto you. Just as death is an appointment we will all keep, so judgment before the throne of the resurrected Jesus Christ is an appointment we will all keep—the wicked shall be condemned and the righteous shall be vindicated in Christ (Hebrews 9:27).

III. The Different Responses to the One True God (Acts 17:32-34).

A. There are three different responses to Paul's defense of the Christian faith: (1) **mockery** in Acts 17:32—because they did not believe in the resurrection of the body—the body was something to escape—but God has redeemed it as well as the soul and it shall be gloriously raised like the body of Christ—if there is no resurrection of Christ, there is no salvation; (2) **procrastination** in Acts 17:32—they took a middle road, but it is still refusing to trust in Christ; and (3) **faith** in Acts 17:33-34. The two converts mentioned—Dionysius the Areopagite (Eusebius says he became the first bishop and pastor in Athens) and Damaris. There was not a multitude that responded to the gospel, and yet it was the work of God and was not to be despised.

B. Dear ones, these are still the same responses you may make to the inescapable God today. Do not mock Him (Titus 1:16). Do not procrastinate in trusting Him, loving Him, and obeying Him. Receive Him and rest in Jesus Christ alone for your eternal salvation, whom to know is eternal life.

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