

The Unknown God

One of my favorite places to visit is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. Located in that tomb lie the remains of soldiers who have died in different wars, but never identified. In fact, the inscription reads, "Known only to God." These brave soldiers have never been identified, not because we don't want to know, but because there was no identification on their bodies and other efforts to acquire their identities have proven fruitless.

I am reminded of another "unknown" that was the center of attention. In Acts 17 we read of Paul's discourse to the people of Athens. He had witnessed the city full of idols and the altar that was erected to the "unknown God," and felt compelled to tell the citizens of Athens about the one true and living God. However, while Paul's focus was on the people of Athens, his comments ring ever true for us today. Before we're quick to denounce those people, let us realize that this world is full of gods as well. The gods of fame and fortune have caused pain and heartache for so many of those we know and love. Only a return to the true knowledge of God can take that pain away. Let's look at what made Paul's message important and what lessons we can learn from them.

God is not of this world (v 24). To the Athenians all their gods dwelt on the earth, in the temples man erected in their honor. The gods such as Zeus, Athena, and Theseus all had their temples where they "lived" and where people could pay their respects. Paul said, *"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands"* (Acts 17:24). Paul explained that the God of heaven and earth (and the Creator of them), does not dwell where the gods of man live. He is not constrained by the buildings man may erect, a concept even Solomon recognized when he built the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 2:6).

Needs no help from us (vv 25-26). Unlike the gods of the people of Athens, who set out food for the gods to consume, the Lord God needs no help from us to sustain Himself. Paul said in vv 25-26, *"neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation."* It is He who created us and it is by His plan we live and exist. We cannot help God, we can only accept the help He has extended to us.

Is near enough for us to find (vv 27-29). Verses 27-29 say, *"that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."* God did not put forth a plan to save mankind, then run and hide where no one could find Him. Rather, by saying He is near, Paul showed God's desire to care for us and that He is concerned about those He created. He's not going to leave us alone, but is available to help us "seek and find."

Desires all to be saved (vv 30-31). Paul sums up his speech to the Athenians by saying, *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man who He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."* The apostle Paul encouraged the people of Athens to give up their false gods and instead, embrace the one true living God. His call to repentance and faith in Him, is what would lead these people to salvation. It is still His desire for all people everywhere, regardless of race, creed, or color, to be saved. If it was possible for the pagan people of Athens to accept God's mercy, then it is possible for us too.

Paul has shown there is only one true, living God. He has made His presence known leaving us without an excuse (Rom. 1:20). We will all come to that realization sooner or later. Why wait until it is eternally too late? Believe in Him now, accept His gift of salvation and live for Him. Your life will be better for it.

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