

# “What is our God like? Part 2” Acts 17:24-31

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## Introduction

- Last week, we began to examine the “Areopagita”: this defense that Paul gave to the Athenian leaders of the Areopagus about *ἄγνωστο θεο*, “an unknown God.”
- It’s critically important we acquire a deep, accurate, first-hand knowledge of God through God’s self-disclosure in Scripture and experience. Acts 17: 21-31 is one of the most theologically suggestive texts in all of scripture.

## Review of vv.21-26: God is incomprehensibly transcendent

1. **God alone created all things from nothing.** Distinct from Greek view. Implies two orders of being: God and “not God” (everything else). God is ontologically distinct (Isa 45:5-7; 46:5). The OT concept of “holiness” (Heb. *kadosh* = “separate”) embodies this idea.
  2. **God has the right to rule all things (to be “Lord”) by virtue of his having created them.** The act of creating confers on the Creator a universal authority which he shares with us.
  3. **God is not spatially constrained.** The Greeks thought they could control a god’s *locus* by building a temple. But the true God possesses an existence independent of our universe of time, space, matter and energy. This “dimensional beyondness” allows Him to freely enter into these creaturely categories yet not be limited nor changed by them.
  4. **God is utterly self-sufficient.** He is not dependent on anything outside himself. In Ex 3:14, he disclosed himself to Moses as: “I am that I am,” the Self-Existent One.
  5. **God generously and lovingly sustains all things “in being.”** God donates “being” to all things out of the sheer overflow of His loving and overflowing nature.
  6. **God sovereignly guides all of human history to accomplish his overarching goal.** God is at work behind the geopolitical scenes achieving his purpose of restoring all creation to himself in Christ by his Spirit, creating a “new heaven and new earth.”
- All of these highlight God’s transcendence and elicit our awe. Now Paul is going to focus on God’s proximate, intimate attributes which elicit our responsive love and trust.

## Exposition of vv. 27-31: God is incomparably intimate

<sup>27</sup> **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.**

- **God's intent throughout human history is that people seek and find him.** God has used a multiplicity of ways to reveal himself throughout human history. This reveals God's heart. He created us for face-to-face relationship and is relentlessly pursuing us (Lk 15:1-24; 19:10; 1 Tim 2:1-5).

<sup>28</sup> **'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'**

- **God is incomparably present to us at all times.** The world exists within God (the doctrine of God's immanence). We are in him as a fetus is in its mother, surrounded, protected and nourished by him. Cf. Ps 34:17-19; 65:4; 139:1-18; 145:18-20.
- **God has created humans in his own likeness.** Cf. Gen 1:26-28. Paul is approvingly quoting Aratus of Cilicia. Having created humans in his image (Gen 1:26-28), God regards humans with particular relational fondness (e.g., Matt 6:26; cf. Jer 31:3).

<sup>29</sup> **"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.**

- **God should be "imaged" by humans themselves, not by anything they make.** This exposes the inanity of idolatry. When we worship things subsidiary to God rather than God himself we degrade ourselves as God's "imagers."

<sup>30</sup> **In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.**

- **God, since Pentecost, calls for all people to "turn" back to an intimate face-to-face relationship with himself.** Prior to Christ, he "gave over" the nations to their idolatrous ways (Rom 1:24,26,28; Deut 32:8-9) having temporarily disinherited them after the Babylon Ziggurat incident (Gen 11:1-9; Ex 32:8-9). Then, in the "fullness of times", he sent his Son to redress Israel (Gal 4:4-5; Matt 10:5-6). Finally, after his resurrection, Christ sent his Spirit to fill, empower and miraculously attest to all nations that God was inviting them back into face-to-face relationship with himself (Matt 28:18-20).

<sup>31</sup> **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.”**

- **God will, through Jesus, judge the world in righteousness.** God cares deeply about justice (Deut 32:4; Micah 6:8). Despite our tragic history of injustice, His perfect justice will prevail in the end (e.g., Mt 25:21-46; Rev 20:11-15). And it is Jesus, as Son of man, who will dispense this justice, assisted by us (1 Cor 6:2-3; Rev 20:4).
- **God has supplied sufficient evidence for believing the Gospel through Christ’s resurrection.** Christ’s defeat of death proved conclusively that he was the unique Son of God, predicted by the prophets, who was sent by God to bring to conclusion God’s redemptive purposes (Acts 2:22-32; 1 Cor 15:3-7, 12-28). There have been various resuscitations, but only one resurrection (transmutation), the “Firstfruits.”

## **Take away**

- We can trust God with every detail of our lives. Because he is incomprehensibly transcendent of all creaturely limitations, he has the ability to meet every need in our lives and satisfy every desire. And because he is incomparably intimate, he cares deeply for each of us: we can trust his heart. So, he invites us to quit trusting in your own wisdom, experience and abilities or those of others and to put our entire confidence and hope in the sufficiency and goodness of our transcendent yet intimate God!