

“What is our God like?” Acts 17:24-31

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 5, 2021

Tom Mount – Holy Trinity Chico

Scripture reading – Acts 17:15-23

Introduction

- “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us,” AW Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*. That being the case, how important is it that we have an accurate conception of God?
- Acts 17:24-31 is one of the most theologically suggestive texts in all of scripture. If we can grasp what Paul is telling us here, it will change our lives.

²⁴ **“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.**

- **God alone created all things from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).** Cf. Gen 1:1; 14:11, 23; Jn 1:1-4; Rev 4:11. So, there are two orders of being: there is God and there is “not God.” God is ontologically distinct. He is not one species of a larger genus of deity (Isa 45:5-7; 46:5). In the OT, the concept of “holiness” (Heb. *kadosh* = separate) embodies this idea. Thus, God cannot be known except to the degree that he discloses himself (Deut 29:29).
- **God has the right to rule all things by virtue of his having created them.** The act of creating confers on the Creator an implied universal authority. God chooses to rule through delegated authority. He rules the spiritual realm by means of a divine council (Ps 82:1; 89:6-7; Dan 7:26). He rules the earth through humans. In Genesis 1:26-28, God delegated authority to humans to rule the earth. In Genesis 3:1-25, humans unwittingly abdicated their authority to Satan and, later, to other fallen *elohim* (Genesis 6:1-4; 11:1-9). For this reason, the Son of God became a “Son of man” to restore our authority over the earth. This process was commenced at his first coming and will be completed after his second coming (Heb 2:5-9).
- **God is not spatially constrained.** Since early in human history, humans have thought they could control a god’s *locus* by building a temple (e.g., Gen 11:1-9). In his covenant with Israel, God chose to make his presence manifest in the tabernacle and later the

temple, but he was not “located” there (Isa 66:1). God transcends all spatial constraints. God possesses an existence independent of our universe of time, space, matter and energy.

²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

- **God is utterly self-sufficient.** Man is *a being*—an “I am”—but God alone is Being itself—the sole “I am that I am,” non-contingent and non-derived (Ex 3:14). God doesn’t need us or our service, for His “needs” are amply met within himself, so he never acts out of neediness.
- **God generously and lovingly sustains all things “in being.”** He is the source or ground of all that exists. God donates “being” to all things out of the sheer overflow of His loving and gratuitous nature. He is an inexhaustible artesian well of overflowing life! (E.g.; Ps 104:29-30; Jer 2:13; Jn 7:37-39; 10:10; Rev 22:1.)

²⁶ 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 has sovereignly guided all of human history in accomplishing his overarching purpose.** He has this while preserving human agency. While powerful political figures and strong armies factor into geopolitics, God is at work behind the scenes achieving his larger purposes. (E.g.; Dan 2:36-45; Lk 21:24; Isa 40:23-24; 45:1-7.)

²⁷ 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 gives us insight into God’s heart: he created us for intimate face-to-face relationship and is relentlessly pursuing that goal (Lk 15:1-24; 19:10; 1 Tim 2:1-5).

²⁸ ‘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.** Possibly quoting from Epimenides of Crete. 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 quoting Aratus of Cilicia. Having created humans in his image (Gen 1:26-28), God regards humans with particular relational fondness (e.g., Jer 31:3).

²⁹ **“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.** When we worship things subsidiary to God rather than God himself—when we treat penultimate things as though they were Ultimate—we degrade ourselves, not God, since we were meant to be his imagers on earth.

³⁰ **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). Then, in the “fullness of times”, he sent his Son to redress Israel (Gal 4:4-5; Matt 10:5-6). Then, 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). He was re-inheriting the nations which he temporarily disinherited after the Babylon Ziggurat incident (Gen 11; Ex 32:8-9).

³¹ **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). Jesus, as Son of man, will dispense this justice, and we will assist him (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).