

## Who Is God? – Part 1

### Acts 17:16-31 (16-29)

This quick series of lessons before our summer break is “The Only Sovereign”.

It is my goal and hope to give you just a taste of who God is and what it means that He is sovereign and what that means for your life.

Charles Spurgeon who is a great Bible teacher said, “The Sovereignty of God is the pillow on which the Christian rests his head.”

What he means is that even though we live in a crazy world, it is the knowledge that God is in control of all things that allows us to have peace and rest anyway. Now, you may be listening at me tonight and saying, “What the world is sovereignty?”

And that’s ok, that’s exactly what we want to show you in this series of lessons.

And to do that I am going to look tonight at Acts 17.

Just a little background.

- The book of Acts shows us 3 missionary journeys that the apostle Paul took.
- On Paul’s 2nd missionary journey God directed him into the region of Macedonia
- In a Bible sense, this is where the Thessalonians lived and the Philippians
- Today you know it as Greece.
- When Paul went, he had trouble in Philippi getting arrested for casting a demon out of a girl, but he had even bigger trouble in Thessalonica having to escape out of that town.
- He went down to Berea but the Thessalonians followed him and so he had to flee by himself, and he ended up in Athens.

You are familiar with Athens

- Athens being the home of ancient philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. (all who had been dead now around 400 years).
- And you are likely familiar with Greek mythology and their various Greek gods like Zeus and Aphrodite and Apollo and Artemis and Poseidon and all the other gods.

Well, this is where Paul ended up. Athens holds almost a romantic and sentimental place in people’s history. (People love the philosophy and mythology and sort)

But know this.

- **Athens was a satanic city.**

- **Instead of truth they followed human reason.**
- **Instead of God they worshiped idols.**

They were the most deceived people on the planet. By their own admonition they did not know who the one true God was. And that is what Paul is about to explain to them. He is going to show them who God is.

I want to sort of give you the setting of his visit.  
(READ 16-21)

That sort of paints the picture of the scene that is about to unfold.

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.”

In short, Paul couldn't handle what he was seeing.

- **There were idols everywhere.**
- **People worshiping false gods everywhere.**
- **(And we won't even talk about what some of that worship looked like)**

It was grotesque and sickening to Paul. I think you'd almost have to liken it to a Christian's disdain for the Las Vegas strip Or Bourbon St during Mardi Gras. I had my experience the other year with Las Vegas. It was vile, it was sinful, and just the sight of it offended Paul. But what likely offended him more than any of it was the fact that people were giving God's glory to false gods.

Isaiah 42:8 “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.”

Isaiah 48:11 “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.”

You've probably heard before that  
The Bible says that God is a “jealous God”

- Some people have turned their head at this since jealousy is also called a sin in the New Testament.
- How can God command us not to be jealous when the Scripture says that He is jealous?

There's one major difference between our jealousy and God's jealousy.

We are jealous for and desire what we do not deserve.  
God is jealous for what He does deserve.

The Bible tells you not to be jealous out of envy, because you want something you don't have, but God most certainly deserves all the glory, and He demands it. He does not share His glory. And Paul is provoked with jealousy for God

And he cannot be silent about it.

- **So, he went into the synagogue and started preaching to the Jews,**
- **And he went into the market place every day and started preaching to the people of Athens.**
- **He was stirring it up.**

And that's when some of the philosophers showed up.

(18) "And also, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities," — because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

- **We won't get into the beliefs of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers,**
- **It's enough for you to know that they took issue with Paul and thought him to be a buffoon.**
- **"What would this idle babbler wish to say?"**
- **"He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities"**

We are told it's because Paul "was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

- Certainly, then we know Paul was preaching that Jesus rose from the dead and thus He is the conqueror of death and the Savior.
- But later as Paul goes deeper into his sermon, you'll find that he was also preaching Jesus' resurrection as an indicator that He is God's righteous standard of judgment.

So, Paul wasn't just standing in that marketplace telling people they could have eternal life. Paul was preaching about judgment and God's standard of judgment who is Jesus.

It is also clear that these people had no clue what he was talking about.

- **This notion of resurrection and judgment was all new to them.**
- **(20) "you are bringing some strange things to our ears."**

So, these philosophers took issue with Paul, and they challenged him.

- And they took him to the "Areopagus" to have it out with him.

Don't misunderstand, they aren't interested.

- The "Areopagus" was the same place Socrates was condemned.
- No, their goal is to debate him and humiliate him.
- If you've ever watched some of these TV shows where they bring in people just to expose and humiliate them...that's what is happening here.

So, Paul is in this worldly city that doesn't know God and is full of idolatry. He has irritated the pagan philosophers. He has been called to explain himself before the city.

And Paul's sermon will have 2 main points.

- 1) GOD'S DISTINCTION (why He is different from all your other gods)
- 2) GOD'S DECLARATION (what He wants from you)

But it is fitting for us tonight to begin our study by seeing what makes God different from all the other "gods" in the world.

So, let's look at this first point.

### **1. GOD'S DISTINCTION**

**Acts 17:22-29**

In short, Paul wants to show them the God they know nothing about.

(22-23) "So Paul stood during the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."

Paul nails them right off the bat.

- He acknowledges their spirituality "very religious"
- He exposes their ignorance "an altar...TO AN UNKNOWN GOD"

By their own admonition they don't know all the gods.

By their own admonition they are ignorant of certain deities.

And so, Paul says, "Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."

And with that Paul is about to give what makes the God of the Bible Totally different and distinct from every other god.

**Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Allah?**

**Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Buddha?**

Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from the 750 Hindu gods?  
Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Greek mythology?  
Do you want to know how the God of the Bible is different from Loki or Thor?

He will give you 4 distinctions,  
These are the things that set God apart.

**1) HE IS CREATOR, NOT CREATED (24a)**  
**“The God who made the world and all things in it...”**

TURN BACK TO GENESIS 1

Genesis 1 may be the most important chapter in the Bible. We learn many things about God from creation. (power, grace, redemption, transcendence, faithfulness) But of most importance is that being Creator gives Him first place in everything. He is the Potter, everything else is the clay.

Let's just read the first 5 verses. Everything you see was created by God. Moses says “the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep”

- **“formless” is TOHU it means confusion**
- **“void” is BOHU it means emptiness.**

**“the earth was TOHU and BOHU”**

- **But God gives order to chaos**
- **God gives purpose to emptiness**
- **God shines light into darkness**

God redeems what is useless and broken.

You literally have redemption in the first 2 verses of the Bible. And notice the power of God. How did God create light? (and notice light came before the sun; day 4) He told it come.

- And it is the same throughout creation. (3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29)
- God's word is the power for new life.

In just 6 days God alone created everything.  
And the Bible is very quick to remind its readers of that.

Isaiah 45:12 “It is I who made the earth and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host.”

Isaiah 45:5-7 “I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will

gird you, though you have not known Me; That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.”

Isaiah 40:26 “Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing.”

God created everything.

- He is the first, there are none before Him.
- He was not created, He is eternal.
- He has no beginning, and He has no end.

No other god can make such a claim.

Isaiah 44:6-8 “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. ‘Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place. ‘Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.”

Jeremiah 10:11 “Thus you shall say to them, “The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.”

Paul could look around Athens and every single one of their deities  
Was first imagined in the human mind  
And then chiseled out of rock with a human arm.

**They were all created.**

**They were all invented.**

**But not the God of the Bible.**

He stands apart as the Creator of all things.

- **He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.**
- **The One who formed you and the One who will judge you.**

That makes Him distinct from every other god.

He is Creator, not created

## **2) HE IS SOVEREIGN, NOT DESTITUTE (24b-25)**

**“since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since Him Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;”**

- **Paul looked around at all those temples that filled Athens.**
- **And he looked at all those worshipers taking their offerings in in order provide for their deities.**

To this day you can see Hindus shoving food in the mouths of their statues to “feed” their deities. And Paul notes how small and puny their gods are. You couldn’t fit the “Lord of heaven and earth” in one of those temples.

The God of the Bible couldn’t cram His big toe into that place. (hyperbole)

Matthew 5:34-35 “But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.”

You say, “But didn’t God have a temple?”

- **Yes, but have you ever heard from the man who built it?**

Solomon built the first temple and here is what he said when he finished it.

2 Chronicles 2:5-6 “ Solomon knew God would never be able to fit in this temple, It was just a ceremonial place where worship could occur.

Listen to this description of God. (Isaiah 40:12)

How big is God?

He’s bigger than anything the people of Athens could imagine.

And He most certainly is NOT dependent on people to provide for His needs.

He is not “served by human hands, as though He needed anything.” Psalms 50:10-12

I can assure this that God is not some needy god

Depending on you or me for His well-being. (Isaiah 40:28-29) God doesn’t need you to feed Him or take care of Him or let Him take a nap.

**GOD IS NOT DESTITUTE; HE IS THE SOVEREIGN.**

**“He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.”**

- **When was the last time you gave a second thought to making sure God had food to eat or water to drink?**
- **When was the last time you gave a second thought to wondering if God needed your protection?**

We don't do that for Him; He does that for His creation.

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father."

- **It is God who provides for you.**
- **It is God who is keeping your heart beating at this very moment.**
- **It is God who sends rain on the just and the unjust.**
- **It is God who keeps this earth in orbit.**
- **It is God who sustains life.**

All these other pathetic gods in Athens needed someone to take care of them, but not the true God. He is sovereign and totally self-sufficient.

**He is Creator, not created**

**He is Sovereign, not destitute**

**3) HE IS INVOLVED, NOT INDIFFERENT (26-28)**

I hope you notice how involved God is in every aspect of your life.

Do you see that God created every human being?

(26) "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth"

God created you.

Do you see that God determined when you would live and where you would live?

(26b) "having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation."

**God sovereignly determined you,**

**WHEN you would live, and WHERE you would live.**

Psalms 139:16 "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them."

**YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT,**

- **You were specifically designed by the Creator exactly as you are.**
- **He formed every part of you.**
- **He inserted you into life at His divine time.**



- **He planted right where He intended to put you.**

You are not an afterthought to Him.  
He is not indifferent to you.

None of those false gods created you, or ordained your days, or knows your name  
(mostly because they aren't even real)

- **Allah doesn't know your name**
- **Buddha doesn't know who you are**
- **The Hindu gods have no clue what you're like**

But the Bible says the God who created you knows the number of hairs on your head.

THE TRUE GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU

- **Every word you've spoken**
- **Every thought you've thought**
- **Every deed you've done**

(Psalms 139:1-6)

He is intimately acquainted with you. He is not distant, and He is not aloof, but why would God make me like this? Why would God put me where He put me?  
Why did God make me like He made me and put me where He put me?

Do you want to see the answer?  
(27) "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him"

You were intricately designed, meticulously created,  
Purposely placed for one overarching reason,  
**AND THAT IS THAT YOU WOULD SEEK GOD.**

- **You were created to know Him.**
- **You were created to fellowship with Him.**
- **You were created to be an instrument of His glory.**

Everything about your life was perfectly ordained so that you might know and glorify the God who created you.

(1 Corinthians 8:6)

You were created by God and for God.  
You were created to seek Him.

And here is what is remarkable.

- **You aren't just supposed to seek Him,**
- **You are supposed to "find Him,**
- **And we are told that He is not far from each one of us;"**
- **He is not distant.**

We call it REVELATION

If it wasn't for God choosing to reveal Himself, we could never know Him.

We live inside of space and time; He lives outside of space and time.

If He didn't want, you to know Him you couldn't. But God has chosen to reveal Himself.  
God has chosen to let you find Him.

Things like creation:

Psalms 19:1 "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

Things like the Scripture:

Psalms 19:7 "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."

Things like Jesus:

John 1:18 "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

God wants you to know Him.

He has revealed Himself over and over and over. It is why you were created.

You can't say that about false gods. (they can't reveal anything)  
(Psalms 115:4-8)

There was a Chinese restaurant that had a big Buddha statue in the lobby. I watched a go in there once and slapped that Buddha. Do you know what he did? NOTHING

They aren't real and they can't reveal themselves to you. But God created you to know Him.

**To seek Him**

**And to find Him**

He is not some distant god that you cannot know.  
He is involved in every detail of your life.

(28) “for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said,  
‘For we also are His children.’”

We are created in His image. His distinctions over other gods?  
He is Creator, not created- He is Sovereign, not destitute- He is Involved, not indifferent

#### **4) HE IS LIVING, NOT DEAD (29)**

“Being then the children 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.”

And Paul now comes full circle. He could look around and see all these statues  
Of carved idols and painted gods and Paul says, the real God IS NOTHING LIKE ALL OF  
THESE! HE IS FAR ABOVE THEM ALL.

(Isaiah 40:18-2) God asks, if you were to carve an image of Him what would it be?  
Because whatever you pick would be a slap in the face to Him.

Would you really compare God to an ox or an eagle or even a man?  
Any image you make of Him is a tremendous insult to Him.  
He is higher than all of that!

(Jeremiah 10:1-16) This is the real God.

We could spend so much more time on every one of those realities,  
But I simply tonight want to give you a brief picture of what we mean  
When we say that GOD IS SOVEREIGN.

**He is the Creator**  
**He is In control over all things**  
**He is Involved in your life**  
**He is Living and the source of life**

And He refuses to give His glory to any other made up God.  
• **He refuses to let some other god take credit for your life.**  
• **He refuses to let some other god be the object of your worship.**

He created you to know Him and to worship Him. And I'll tell you that the biggest sin of  
humanity is that the creature (us) whom God formed out of the dirt, would dare to defy

the God who created him.

(Romans 1:18-23) Read

God demands glory from all His creation, and that includes you. And since He is the God who created You, and who is intimately acquainted with all your ways, it is wise that you do so.

Tonight, I just want to begin by stretching your understanding of God.

- He is not some secondary thought to your life.
- You were created by Him and for Him.
- Tonight, for the first time perhaps you should consider that.

Class once you learn who God is and what he is like your whole life will change!