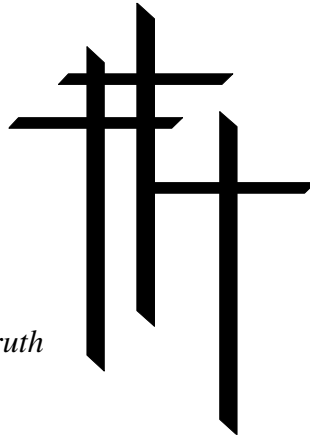


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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THE UNKNOWN GOD — PART 3

by Gregg Bing

Continued from last month.

When Paul arrived in Athens, he found a city completely given over to idols. As Paul's spirit was provoked within him, and he spoke to these people about the Lord, he aroused their curiosity and was brought by the Greek philosophers to the Areopagus, the highest Greek court. Here Paul was given a wonderful opportunity to share with these unbelieving people the truth of God. Paul spoke freely and openly the things of God,

but he depended upon the Holy Spirit to help him choose his words wisely. Paul began by respectfully acknowledging their devotion to their gods, then, using one of their own altars as an illustration, he turned their attention to the One who was, to them, "THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Paul could not communicate to these Athenians in the same way he did to the Jews. These Gentiles had no background in the Old Testament Scriptures, and they were certainly not looking for a Messiah to

come. So, Paul concentrated on things they did have knowledge of: their gods and the world around them. Paul started with the nature of God, a God who is so much more awesome than the gods they worshipped. The God who was unknown to these people is the Creator of all things, and thus, Lord of all. A God such as this cannot be contained in temples made with hands, nor can He be worshipped as the Athenians worshipped their gods, with the works of their hands. The true God does not need anything from man. On the contrary, God gives us everything we need: "life, breath, and all things." Paul proceeded to declare to these worldly wise men the eternal purpose of God for man.

Purpose of God

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings." (Acts 17:26)

Every nation of men comes from one blood, the blood of the first man, Adam. As these nations were formed, God determined their boundaries and pre-appointed the times and ways He would deal with them. For instance, many question why so much of the Old Testament is taken up with the small, seemingly insignificant nation of Israel. The answer is, when the nations turned away from the worship of the true God (first during the days of Noah and later at the tower of Babel), God gave them up (Rom. 1:18-32).

God called out Abram to be the father of a new nation, Israel; a nation He would keep separate from all other nations (Gentiles); a nation He would use to bring the Savior into the world. While God was carrying out this purpose through Israel, the rest of the Gentiles were outsiders, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

Though they were God's chosen people, eventually, the nation of Israel gradually turned away

from God, rejecting Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, God set this nation aside and opened up salvation to the Gentiles. While God made clear difference between Jew and Gentile in the past, today, in the Church, the Body of Christ, this difference has been removed. While men may question these things, God's dealings with the nations have all been in accordance with His eternal purpose which He "accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). Paul expressed this purpose to the Athenians with these words:

"So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that 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 have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring." (Acts 17:27-28)

God desires that men seek Him and find Him. It's not that He is hiding

from men, not at all, for "He is not far from each one of us." Paul reminded Timothy that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). To this end, God has made Himself known to man in different ways through the ages: through His creation (Psalm 19:1-6, Rom. 1:19-20), through His written Word (Isa. 1:2, Heb. 1:1), and finally, through His Son (Heb. 1:2, John 1:18).

It is vital that man find God because "in Him we live and move and have our being." As the Creator, God is the Author of all life, and all men are God's offspring, as one the Athenian poets had said, but only in regard to their physical life. Only those who trust in Christ as Savior become spiritual children of God.

As Paul reached the climax of his message, he appealed to these men of reason with a logical question: "Since we are the offspring of God," as one of their own poets had written, "we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone,

something shaped by art and man's devising" (Acts 17:29). In other words: Man did not create God; God created man. Paul then pointed out their:

Responsibility to God

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

Three "times" are identified in these verses: times of ignorance (past), time to repent (present), and the day of judgment (future). God overlooking their "times of ignorance" does not imply that God excused their sin of idolatry; it simply means He did not judge their sin at that time. Paul wrote to the Romans about the Gentile nations who "worshiped and served the creature

(creation) rather than the Creator," saying "God gave them up" (Rom. 1:25). While God turned from dealing with the nations collectively to dealing with only one nation, Israel, the Gentiles would still one day face the "righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 1:18, 32).

Now has come the time when God "commands all men everywhere to repent," both Jew and Gentile. The word "repent" is typically associated with the Jews, who were once in covenant relationship with God under the law. Having gradually turned away from Him to worship idols, Israel was called upon by John the Baptist and by the Lord Jesus to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. However, the word "repent" simply means to change the mind, something that is required of all men, both Jews and Gentiles, if they would be saved. Through Paul, God had "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). Speaking to the Ephesian elders about his ministry among them, Paul said that he testified "to

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Jews, and also to Greeks (Gentiles), repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21). It was time for these Gentiles at Athens to change their minds about who was the true God and to seek the spiritual life that can be found only in Him.

Paul warned these un-

believers they would one day answer to God, for He has appointed “a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31). This verse points out two things that should be a vital part of our witness. First, our testimony should include the fact that all men are sinners, and that God will one day judge the sins of men. Second, our testimony should always culminate in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ. Paul was certainly going in this direction with His testimony. He declared that God, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, had given assurance that He was indeed the One ordained by God to carry out this judgment. No doubt Paul would have gone on to give the complete gospel of Jesus Christ: His death for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, and our need to believe in Him (1 Cor. 15:1-4), but Paul was hindered from doing so.

Response to the Word

When these so-called

philosophers (literally “lovers of wisdom”) “heard of the resurrection, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” They refused to allow Paul to proceed with his testimony; they had heard enough.

It is a difficult thing when our testimony is rejected by men, but we need not be discouraged. We must realize that, within ourselves, we do not have the power to persuade men. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to speak to them through His Word. Paul was faithful in his stewardship. He preached the Word, knowing that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). When they ceased to listen any longer, Paul “departed from among them.”

Though the majority rejected the Word, “some men joined him (Paul) and believed, among them Dionysius, the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:34). Since only a few were saved, many present day Christians might consider this

evangelistic meeting a failure. God, however, took special note of those who did believe. He even mentioned two by name, demonstrating His delight in the salvation of these precious souls. This shows how important it was for Paul to take a stand and speak boldly to this group of unbelievers. It may have seemed useless to try, but God’s Word is powerful enough to reach even the most hardened heart.

Conclusion

There is so much to learn from Paul’s ministry in Athens. As ambassadors for Christ today, we face similar audiences with the same mindset and the same need. To the majority of the world, God is unknown. Many are certainly religious, some even devoted to worship, but, like the Athenians, their devotion is misdirected. These lost souls need believers like Paul, who are willing to stand and boldly proclaim to them “THE UNKNOWN GOD;” even when it is not easy; even when they themselves may

be personally discouraged at the time; even when they know they will face ridicule or hostility; even when the prospects for success do not look promising. This is why Paul's final charge to Timothy was: "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

We must remember: God desires "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). The question for us is: How do we respond when we encounter people who are unsaved? May God help us to respond as Paul did when he arrived at Athens. May our spirit be provoked within us when we see people to whom our God is "THE UNKNOWN GOD."

That I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.
—Ephesians 6:19

THE MAN OF GOD — PART 3

By Gregg Bing

Continued from last month.

"But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Tim. 6:11-12)

A "man of God" is characterized by three specific traits: he flees certain things, he follows after certain things, and he fights the good fight of faith. Last month, we looked at Paul's admonitions to believers to "flee sexual immorality" and to "flee idolatry," both found in Paul's letters to the Corinthian believers. In 1 Timothy 6, Paul told Timothy to "flee these things." The context of this chapter reveals there are

two such "things" the man of God is to flee.

Flee False Teaching

Paul's first letter to Timothy teaches the proper conduct for believers in "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Having communicated these truths to Timothy, Paul instructed Timothy to "teach and exhort these things" (1 Tim. 6:2), but he also warned Timothy about those who taught otherwise (differently) and did not "consent (agree) to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3).

The word "wholesome" is translated from the same Greek word which gives us our English word "hygiene" which means sound or healthy. Paul often referred to the truth en-

trusted to him by God as “sound” doctrine. For instance, in 1 Timothy 1:10-11 Paul spoke of “sound doctrine” as “the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust” (cf. 2 Tim. 1:13, 4:3, Titus 1:9, 2:1). Many today do not “consent to” (agree with) the truths given to Paul for this present dispensation of God’s grace. They insist that Paul’s words are somehow inferior to the words Jesus spoke while He was here on earth. Paul is careful to point out that the “wholesome words” he spoke were, in fact, the “words of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This glorious gospel message is sound doctrine for our spiritual lives today; it “accords with godliness” instilling within us a proper attitude of reverence for God.

Those who teach otherwise and do not consent to God’s truth for this present age have a very different attitude.

“He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from

which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.” (1 Tim. 6:4-5)

These false teachers are proud, caring only about themselves. They have no reverence for God and no concern for others. Having rejected the truth of God’s Word, they know nothing and have no real desire even to come to a knowledge of the truth. Instead, they are obsessed with finding objections to the things of God and arguing over words (trivial things), activities which are useless and only result in envy, strife, criticism, and evil suspicions. The men who follow this path have had their minds corrupted (perverted, twisted) by Satan (2 Cor. 11:3). They have turned their ears away from the truth, and been turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:4). They reason within themselves that godliness (pious behavior) is a

means of personal gain. They have “forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). Paul says very pointedly, “From such withdraw yourself” or, in other words, “flee!”

Flee the Love of Money

Money is the primary motivation for most false teachers, but it must not be so for “the man of God.” Nothing is more detrimental to a person’s ministry for the Lord or more destructive to his or her credibility than the “love of money.”

Money is clearly a temporary possession. “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Tim. 6:7). The accumulation of money or the things it can buy is not real gain. However, “godliness with contentment (the very opposite of covetousness) is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Having the things we need to

sustain our physical life (food, clothing, etc.), we should learn to be content, to recognize, as Paul did: “my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

There is nothing wrong with having money; that is not the problem. The problem lies in the desires of men’s hearts.

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” (1 Tim. 6:9)

The word “desire” implies careful thought, purpose, and determination—the will to become rich or wealthy in this world’s goods. This type of desire causes men to “fall,” which carries the idea of falling into or under the power or control of someone or something else. When our minds and hearts are focused on money and the things of this world, we fall under Satan’s power. We “fall into temptation and a

snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts;” lusts which Satan can use to entice us and ensnare us (cf. James 1:14-15); lusts which are foolish and harmful, to ourselves as well as to others; lusts which drown us in the depths of destruction and perdition (loss, ruin), not necessarily physical or financial ruin, but certainly spiritual ruin.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1 Tim. 6:10)

The love of money, not the possession of it, is the root (cause or origin), of all kinds of evil. This covetous desire for monetary gain leads us to become involved in every imaginable type of evil activity: lying, stealing, even murder. A glance at the local newspaper of almost any city, regardless of its size, testifies to the truth of this statement. However, the greatest danger is that in their

greedy desire to have more and more, men have strayed away from the faith (the truth of God’s Word) and been led into error. As a result, they have “pierced themselves through with many sorrows,” torturing their souls with continual and consuming grief. Paul commands the man of God to “flee these things.”

Jesus taught this same basic truth to His disciples in Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money).”

A “man of God” is to be God’s man, God’s servant, thus he is to be constantly fleeing anything that would hinder his relationship with God or his service for God. It is an undeniable fact: you cannot serve God and money! It is simply not possible.

For the first forty years of his life, Moses was raised as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter in Egypt. He had access to all the treasures and riches of that great nation (consider the

gold and treasures that have been discovered in the excavated pyramids of Egypt). Yet, Moses esteemed (valued) the reproach and shame of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt. He chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” What helped Moses with this difficult choice? He turned his eyes and his desires away from everything else and looked to one thing—“he looked to the reward” of serving the Lord (Heb. 11:24-26). The person whose values and priorities are set on spiritual things, as Moses’ was, can truly be called a “man of God.”

Next month we will look at the things Paul commands the man of God to follow after.

(Continued Next Month)

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
—Matthew 6:19-21



Youth Retreat

December 28-30, 2006

This year’s Winter Youth Retreat, for youth ages 13 through college age, will be held December 28-30 at Three Mountain Retreat in Clifton, Texas. If you would like to take part in this retreat, contact Grace Bible Church and we will send you a registration form, or you can get a copy of the form on our website.

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