

Reminders of Our Purpose

Selected Scriptures

We would like to take a moment to tell you what Covenant Baptist considers to be priorities for this ministry. It really can be summed by three commitments.

First, *we are committed to the Exaltation of God*. We desire that the people at Covenant truly understand who God is and His rightful place in their lives. He is our Lord and our Sovereign God to whom we owe worship and obedience. We proclaim God as Sovereign and Savior. He rules and reigns in the affairs of men and He alone is able to save us from our sinful condition.

Second, *we are committed to the Edification of the Saints*. We consider it extremely important to correctly teach the Bible. This is why we are considered expository in our preaching and teaching. We want to teach verse by verse and explain what the Bible means so we can properly have the Holy Spirit apply it to our lives. The Pulpit ministry is a priority in this ministry. We are not concerned with programs or entertainment, but all our ministries are focused on Edification through Biblical Teaching. We believe and accept “The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith” as our basis for all teaching and ministry.

Third, *we are committed to Evangelization of the Sinner*. We understand that God has given us the responsibility to be stewards of the Gospel and that means sharing it exactly like God gave it to us with those who need Jesus. We desire thru local ministry and missions that the Gospel be proclaimed so many will come to know Him as Savior and Lord.

Lesson

1 *We are committed to the Exaltation of God.*

None other than National Public Radio recently lamented the growing trivialization of values in American society. In an [NPR web-article](#) entitled, “Trivialization Nation” (Feb. 2010) Linton Weeks writes, “The wide-spread trivialization of meaningful things is indisputable. Sound bites and silliness reign supreme. . . . Perhaps the tendency to trivialize is born of band-wagonism or laziness. . . . Trivializing large ideals is easier than living up to them. And it’s less scary.”

Elsewhere, the article cited an interview with the [president of Harvard, Drew Faust](#), in which she was asked to respond to the [dumbing down of American culture](#). “I worry about [attention span](#),” Faust said, “because people will not listen to more than a couple of sentences or read more than a couple of sentences. Does everything have to be a sound bite? Is everything to be digested into something brief? And aren’t there complicated ideas that we ought to have the patience to give our attention to?” ([Source](#))

A [CNBC article](#) entitled, “[Is Twitter Making You Stupid?](#)” concludes with this sobering assessment: “It seems that we’ve managed, in the words of playwright Richard Foreman . . . to transform ourselves into ‘pancake people’—spread wide and thin as we connect with that vast network of information accessed by the mere touch of a button.”

Art Linkletter saw a small boy drawing a picture. He inquired,

"What are you drawing?" The small boy replied, *"A picture of God."* Linkletter told the lad that no one knows what God looks like, to which the boy confidently responded, *"They will when I get through."*

Someone wrote, "God created man in His own image, and modern man repaid the favor."

A. W. Tozer wrote,

*Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we would be able to predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.*ⁱⁱ

Who is God? Your answer will determine more about you than about God.

Someone might say, "Why bother?"

J. I. Packer warned his generation,

Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction.

The church today is weak and worldly; it is affluent, yet ineffective; it seems out of breath in keeping pace with its mission.

The solution is not:

- a series of campaigns;
- pietistic exercises;
- larger contributions;

- longer fasts;
- smarter methods.

The solution to the ills of the church is a fresh understanding of the nature and character of who God is.

The Puritan writer, Stephen Charnock, wrote two hundred years ago, his classic work, *The Existence and Attributes of God*. He stated these words, “A ii God forgotten is as good as no God to us.”

There has never been a generation more desperately in need of an introduction to God than our generation. And there has never been a church age that has needed a re-introduction to God than our age.

What I wish to address here is that God who is Glorious, Majestic, Holy and Sovereign , and that for most believers today, he is really not that glorious or weighty at all. Indeed, we have managed to domesticate God, to dethrone God, and to bring him down to our level.

The Trivialization of God

[The Trivialization of God: The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity](#) book by **Donald McCullough** was published in 1995. At that time, the diminishment of God, not only in our world, but in the church was already far advanced. We were already suffering from the tragic consequences of re-making God into our own image. We had reduced God to a generally polite, always available to help us succeed, deity. We said this is the love of God, but even that understanding was far below the rich, deep fierce love

of God described in the Scriptures. McCullough had well described our serious problem.

God was redefined without the glorious attributes. His "excellencies" were eliminated. We no longer know, understand or experience God as awesome, majestic, magnificent, high and lifted up, glorious in his grandeur, full of supremacy and immensity, absolute and always sovereign over everything and everyone. His holiness ... his godliness itself was truncated.

Donald Writes,

Visit a church on Sunday morning - almost any will do - and you will likely find a congregation comfortably relating to a deity who fits nicely within precise doctrinal positions, or who lends almighty support to social crusades, or who conforms to individual spiritual experiences. But you will not likely find much awe or sense of mystery. The only sweaty palms will be

those of the preacher unsure whether the sermon will go over; the only shaking knees will be those of the soloist about to sing the offertory.

The New Testament warns us, "offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire" [Hebrews 12:28-29, NRSV]. But reverence and awe have often been replaced by a yawn of familiarity. The consuming fire has been domesticated into a candle flame, adding a bit of religious atmosphere, perhaps, but no heat, no blinding light, no power for purification.

When the true story gets told, whether in the partial light of historical perspective or in the perfect light of eternity, it may be well revealed that the worst sin of the church at the end of the twentieth century has been the trivialization of God.

We prefer the illusion of a safer deity, and so we have pared God down to more manageable proportions. Our era has no exclusive claim to the trivialization of God. This has always been the temptation and the failure for the people of God. Pagan gods have caused less trouble than the tendency to re-fashion God into a more congenial, serviceable god.

A year earlier **David Wells produced a significant critique entitled God in the Wasteland** (Eerdmans, 1995). There he bemoaned the fact that the contemporary church has been “attempting to heal the church by tinkering with its structures, its services, its public face.”

Such superficial remedies remind one of Jeremiah’s words about Israel’s carnal leaders: “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious” (Jer. 8:11). Says Wells, these lightweight remedies are “clear evidence that ... God himself is secondary to organization and image, that the church’s health lies in its flow charts, its convenience, and its offerings rather than in its inner life, its spiritual authenticity, the toughness of its moral intentions, its understanding of what it means to have God’s Word in this world.”

He correctly warns, “The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church’s resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common.”

The great English Anglican laywoman, Dorothy Sayers felt the same way back in 1949: “The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore; on the contrary, they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him ‘meek and mild,’ and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.”

Of course the Bible has many warnings about attempting to bring God down to our level, to domesticate him, to strip him of his majesty and holiness. One could cite any number of words from the Old Testament prophets on this for example. But let me cite a more recent prophetic voice who warned repeatedly about all this.

A.W. Tozer never ceased to warn a wayward and apathetic church about these tendencies. He rightly offered these words of rebuke: “Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get Him where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need Him. We want a God we can in some measure control.”

Indeed, he penned an entire book on this theme. In one of his most important works, his 1961 *The Knowledge of the Holy* he hammered home the vital importance of recovering a vision of who this God is with whom we have to do. I encourage everyone to get this book and read it, and read it again, until its truths penetrate our hardened spirits. Here are just a few choice quotes from this utterly important volume:

“The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has not done deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic. The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us.”

“The decline of the knowledge of the holy has brought on our troubles. A rediscovery of the majesty of God will go a long way toward curing them. It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate. If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is.”

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.”

“A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”

“The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is

once more worthy of Him – and of her. In all her prayers and labors this should have first place. We do the greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of God which we received from our Hebrew and Christian fathers of generations past. This will prove of greater value to them than anything that art or science can devise.”

Absolutely. If the church hopes again to become a force for good in the world, and to be the salt and light it is called to be, it must rediscover who God is. And he is not the God of our own devising, but the holy, majestic and transcendent being who said, “This is what God the LORD says – he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ‘I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols’” (Isaiah 42:5,8).

Bill Muehlenberg's commentary

In [*Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*](#), Michael Horton diagnosis well what is ailing much of contemporary Christianity. He argues, “it is not heresy as much as silliness that is killing us softly. God is not denied but trivialized—used for our life programs rather than received, worshiped, and enjoyed.”

While not “profound enough to constitute heresy,” Horton believes that “Christless Christianity” is equally dangerous given the ultimate consequence of its encroachment. “Like the easy-listening Muzak that plays in the background in other shopping venues, the message of American Christianity has simply become trivial, sentimental, affirming, and irrelevant.”

When God becomes irrelevant, He is in essence denied.

Could it be that our churches are being more influenced by the world than the gospel? Has the world, with its sinful pattern of existence (cf. Romans 12:2), so influenced the church that it seems fair to **ask, “Is the church reaching the world, or the world the church?”**

To borrow from C.S. Lewis, we no longer had an Almighty Father in heaven. We were left with a somewhat senile, kindly grandfather who made no demands, had no expectations, had nothing truly awe-inspiring about him... and who seemed mainly concerned to affirm how special we were.

Our God is indeed too small.

What the Hulk said of Loki - "*puny god,*" could be said of most of our images of God - puny, pathetic, and unable to save.

Paul’s Delivery of a Timeless Message

Acts 17:16

¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. ¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbling man want to say?”

Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴ God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ 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; ²⁸ 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.’ ²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ 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.”

In Acts, chapter 17, as Paul stood before the Athenians, he was surrounded by centuries of idolatry. The Greeks had fashioned more than 30,000 statues of their gods and goddesses. All around the apostle loomed those statues of gold, silver, bronze, and stone.

The worshipers

In verse 17a, we are told,

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¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers,

this is the first category of people, which we will call, the worshipers.

The shoppers

Continue to verse 17b.

.and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there *Epicureans and Stoics*

And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. . . .

This is the third group of people, the Epicureans and the Stoics. Continue to verse 18b.

... 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.

Beside the word “Epicurean,” write the word, “indulgent”.

They believed that attaining pleasure and avoiding pain was the chief pursuit of man. They believed people only lived once, and there was nothing after that, so you should squeeze everything out of life that you could, while you could.

The Epicureans would say, burn it as quickly as you earn it; live it up.

While the Epicureans were indulgent,

the Stoics were indifferent. They believed that the pursuit of man was to feel neither pleasure nor pain. Self mastery over circumstances, situations, emotions, etc. was living.

While they were very different, they were united in their contempt of Paul.

Paul’s approach to delivering the message to the people of Athens

Now, notice verses 19 through 22. The Athenians take Paul to the Areopagus, or the high court.

¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

We could learn something from Paul’s approach to the Athenians in these verses. While he ends his sermon with the threat of impending judgment, he begins by tactfully building a bridge.

Notice Paul does not say, “I observed that you are really carried away with idols; I observed how ridiculous you are.” No, Paul says “I observed that you are very religious.”

Some translations unfortunately, render the Greek compound word for “very religious,” to mean, “too superstitious”. That interprets more than it translates. The Greek compound word could actually be translated to read, “I observe that you have respect for the supernatural.”

Look further at verse 23.

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.

Six hundred years before Paul’s visit, history records that Athens had been overwhelmed with a terrible plague. Hundreds were ill and dying and the city was desperate for a cure. A famous poet from Crete, named Epimenides, came up with a plan to pacify whatever gods were causing the plague.

Epimenides went to the Areopagus and turned loose a flock of sheep. The plan was to let the sheep roam the city freely. Whenever an individual sheep lay down, they were to be sacrificed to the god of the nearest temple. The assumption was that the angry gods would actually draw the sheep to themselves. When the sheep were turned loose, however, many of

them lay down in places with no temples nearby. The people did not know what to do, so in order to cover all their religious bases, they built a monument and simply named it, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.”

Paul arrives on the scene and says, “I’m here to give you the missing name; I’ve come to introduce to you that unknown God!”

Continue to verse 24.

God is SOVEREIGN CREATOR

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;

Paul is saying, “My God is more than a monument. He’s more than an idol of marble and stone. My God is the one and only, living Sovereign, and I want to tell you about Him.”

In order to understand the context behind much of what Paul declared to the Athenians, it would help to understand the popular world view held by the Athenians.

Contemporary world views

The world view held by the Athenians is still very popular today. Let me explain that, and also briefly introduce some additional world views. Paul’s words in Athens directly confronts them all.

Polytheism

- Polytheism – the world has more than one god.

This was the world of Athens – and it has become the world of America. Like India with its millions of gods, so America, while maintaining its belief in a supernatural being, has lost its monotheism to polytheism.

This was the world view of ancient Athens and is the current view of modern day Mormons. In fact, Mormon theology believes that our Father God was

created by a previous Father God who was created by still a more ancient Father God – and that we are all

headed to our own personal planet where we also will rule as God.

Deism

- **Deism – one God made the world, then left it alone.**

Probably the most famous deist was Thomas Jefferson – whose disbelief in the miraculous caused him to compose his own New Testament gospels. It was a New Testament void of miracles and therefore, void of the greatest miracle of all – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His New Testament ends with the

verse, “There they laid Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed.”

Deism denies the intervention of God into the affairs of man. While there is a God and He did indeed create all there is, from that point on, He sort of walked away. So God is never involved in His creation.

Deism is not dead, by the way – it was captured in the best selling song “From a Distance,” sung by Bette Midler on her CD entitled, “Experience the Divine”. The lyrics include the words, “God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us . . . from a distance.”

God is not watching us from a distance. The Bible teaches that God is intimately involved with His creation. In fact, as we will see in a moment, the apostle Paul will clearly expound a deeply interested and involved treatment of creation by its creator God.

Pantheism

- **Pantheism – God is the world, the world is God.**

With Pantheism, everything is divine, and the divine is in everything. This is the popular belief represented by Hinduism, Buddhism, and the New Age Movement.

You can certainly understand the popularity of a movement that declares, “You are god,” rather than, “You will stand before God,” right?”

Atheism

- **Atheism – the world has no God.**

Doesn't the picture of a world all alone connote such loneliness?

Finite Godism

- **Finite Godism – the world has a somewhat limited God.**

This view does not hold to the belief in an all powerful creator God. The world evolved by a God who was and is supremely intelligent, but who does not have enough power to keep the world going in the right direction.

Harold Kushner is a popular adherent to this view, primarily because evil exists in the world and bad things happen to people who believe in God. If God were all powerful, shouldn't He . . . couldn't He stop the evil from happening to them?

The scriptures would respond to that as God Himself says, **in**

Isaiah, chapter 55:9b,

. . . My ways [are] higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Finite Godism says, “We can let God off the hook if we just understand that He isn't powerful enough to take care of the universe.”

However, in reality, they have not taken Him off the hook, they have taken Him off the throne.

Theism

- **Finally, Theism – the world was created by an all powerful, personal God.**

Notice back in verse 24 of Acts, chapter 17, Jesus Christ is the,

. . . Lord of heaven and earth . . .

That is, He is the sovereign master over all that there is.

Daniel, 4:34b -35, declares,

For His [God's] dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

In other words, this sovereign ruler is accountable to no one. He answers to no one – not even you or me.

Psalm 103:19, says,

The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.

What right does God have to rule over all there is? Paul answered, in verse 24a, that God is the rightful ruler of heaven and earth because He is,

The God who made the world and all things in it . . .

Do you know why the heart of sinful rebellious man argues against the fact of theistic creation; the fact that God made everything there is? Because, if He made everything there is, then He indeed has the right to rule everyone that

lives. This is then His planet, not ours. This is His animal kingdom, not ours. This is His sun and moon and stars, not ours.

Ultimately, as Paul himself will later declare, and this is the real sticking point with unregenerate man, mankind will one day stand before their creator God and give an account of their works and their worship. Because of that, man stubbornly refuses to acknowledge a creator God – if that domino falls, then we are all in a heap of trouble.

Paul declares, “My God made it all.”

A Biblical Declaration of Creation

Notice that nowhere in Acts, chapter 17, does Paul attempt to prove the existence of God. He simply declares that God is.

Critical passages of Scripture

This is just like the beginning of your Bible, which simply declares, in **Genesis, 1: 1,**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In **Isaiah, chapter 45: 18,** the prophet describes God as,

... the God who formed the earth and made it ...

Jeremiah 10:12

It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens.

Jeremiah 32:17

Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You

In the **New Testament**, we read the same clear, dogmatic declaration. Look at **Ephesians, chapter 3: 9b**,

. . . God . . . created all things

Colossians, chapter 1:16, specifically points to Jesus Christ as the creative agent in the Genesis account of creation. He, the second person of the Godhead, was particularly responsible, for Paul writes under inspiration,

For by Him [Jesus Christ] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

So that is exactly where Paul begins as he addresses a polytheistic Athenian crowd.

Why? Because, I believe, if a person can believe in the first creation by God, then he is prepared to believe in a second creation – the new creation of sinful men and women by redemption. And if a person can believe in a second creation, he will have no trouble believing in a third creation, as described in Revelation, which reveals the future creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Timeless arguments for a Creator

Now notice again verse 24a – Paul states,

The God who made the world and all things in it . . .

Cosmological argument – there must be a cause behind the effects

Paul’s original word translated “world” is the Greek word “kosmos”. It is a clever choice of words simply because Homer, the ancient hero of Athens, used that word to speak of the Greek system of order in their government. Another brilliant Athenian named Plato, used the word to refer to the order in which a woman put on her makeup – this layer first, then that layer. The basic meaning of “kosmos” includes the idea of arrangement and order. When the word came to refer to the universe, it carried with it the idea of order in the universe.

One of the arguments for creation by God is the cosmological argument; that is, since we see the

effects of order, there must be a cause behind the effects.

Teleological argument – complex design demands a divine designer

Another argument for creationism is the teleological argument; that is, the creative complexity of creation demands a divine designer.

Let me give you a couple of examples as we wrap up our discussion. And let me say, I do not consider myself an apologist, especially when it comes to science as illustration. Science was one of those classes I barely survived in order to graduate!

I am kind of like that little five year old boy who came home from Sunday school very excited. His teacher had told the class the story of Adam and Eve and that Eve was created from Adam's rib. A few days later, he was running around and he got a cramp in his side. He ran up and announced, "Mommy, I think I'm having a wife."

Like him, I will admit that I am way over my head, but I do love to read and research.

The first illustration of creation's wonderful design which demands a designer, comes from a book written by **an unbeliever. A bio-chemists rocked the establishment with his publication entitled, *Darwin's Black Box***. In this book, he argues that complex systems could not have evolved, they must have been designed. Let me read some edited comments from his book.

In the 1800's, Darwin's time, the cell was just an unopened black box (that is the idea behind the book title). Darwin assumed that the inside of a cell was simple. Ernst Haeckel, a Darwin disciple, believed that a cell was, "a simple little lump of carbon." This was before the invention of the kind of technology that would allow us to see inside a cell with all of its complexity. Darwin did not have that ability, but this is what Darwin went on to say, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not

possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”

The advent of the electron microscope has allowed the investigation of the complexities at the cellular level. An example of an irreducibly complex system (that is, a system that has to have A-B-C-D . . . happening in order and if any step is pulled out, the system breaks down), consider the clotting of blood after the cut of a skin. Blood clot formation seems so familiar to us that most people do not give it much

thought, unless they are people, such as some in our church, who have hemophilia in their family and then, they give it a lot of thought. Biochemical investigation, however, has shown that blood clotting is a very complex, intricately woven system consisting of a score of inter-dependent parts. The absence of any one of a number of the components causes the entire system to fail – blood does not clot at the proper time or at the proper place. There is a scientific diagram with many lines called the “cascade” which shows the system that operates in your body so that blood clots. If you pull any one of the points out of the formula, the entire system collapses. This biochemist is saying that this kind of irreducibly complex system cannot evolve because it is dependent on other things to happen.

He says, “Could this irreducible complexity have evolved by a gradual process? The fact is, no one on earth has the vaguest idea how the coagulation cascade came to be.”

That is a point that we, as believers, would argue a little with him over.

“Blood coagulation,” he goes on to conclude, “is a paradigm of the staggering complexity that underlies even apparently simple bodily processes. Faced with such complexity beneath even simple phenomena, Darwinian theory falls silent.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The average person who has been taught Darwinian evolution since grade school would never be told of Darwin’s personal anxiety caused by his theory. He had rejected the biblical account of creation and, in fact, the biblical God – and he paid a heavy emotional price.

He wrote a letter to a friend who evidently, believed in God the creator. It was published in 1888, along with many of his letters and notes. Let me quote these words:

I am conscious that I am in an utterly hopeless muddle. I cannot think that the world, as we see it, is the result of chance, and yet I cannot look at each separate thing as the result of design . . . again I say I am, and shall ever remain, in a hopeless muddle.

The apostle Paul answered Darwin when he wrote in Acts, chapter 17, verse 24,

God who made the world and all things in it . . .

In other words, every separate thing is created by the Divine Designer.

One more illustration, this time from a medical doctor named Paul Brand. His book entitled, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, includes another designer truth hidden inside the human cell that Darwin never saw.

Locked away inside each cell nucleus is a chemically coiled strand of DNA. Once the egg and sperm share their inheritance, the DNA chemical ladder splits down the center of every gene much as the teeth of a zipper pull apart. DNA re-forms itself each time the cell divides; 2, 4, 8, 16, 32 cells, each with the identical DNA. Along the way, cells specialize, but each carries the entire instruction book of one hundred thousand genes. DNA is estimated to contain instructions that, if written out, would fill a thousand six-hundred-page books. A nerve cell may operate according to instructions from volume four and a kidney cell from volume twenty-five, but both carry the whole compendium. The DNA is so narrow and compacted that all the genes in my body's cells would fit into an ice cube; yet if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back more than four hundred times.^{iv}

God is Transcendent and Immanent.

Now, in order for the God of the apostle Paul, this unknown God to the Athenians, to be the mover and shaker of planet earth, two things would have to be true: God would have to be transcendent and immanent. It is easy to divide verses 25 through 29 of Acts, chapter 17, along these two theological expressions of the nature and character of God.

God is transcendent

- God is transcendent.

When we say that God is transcendent, we mean

that:

God is over and above all of creation; He is separate from creation; He is a distinct, superior, sovereign spirit.

While God is everywhere, He is not in everything! Notice what Paul says of God, in verses 24 through 25a,

The God who made the world . . .

(He is separate from the world),

. . . and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, . . .

(He is transcendent – over and above as Master),

. . . does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands . . .

This does not mean that we cannot serve Him, it simply means that God does not depend on us for His existence. Theologians refer to that as:

The self-existence of God

He does not need you in order to survive, you need Him! You do not put a plate of food out for this God; you do not have to burn incense to this Deity, as I saw in the homes of unbelievers in Japan, with their god-shelves and constantly burning incense. God does not want the work of our hands, He wants the worship of our hearts.

Notice, in fact, the next phrase in verse 25b,

. . . as though He needed anything . . .

God is self-sufficient!

The original Greek word translated “He needed anything,” is “prosdeomia”. This could be rendered, “He doesn’t want anything or need anything in addition.”

David wrote in Psalm, chapter 50: 10 - 12,

Every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains.

Now notice the last part of **verse 25 of Acts, chapter 17.**

. . . since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things

Now, at this point in his sermon, Paul begins to fire some missiles of truth into the Athenians fortress of Polytheism. They had given to Zeus the honor of being the source of life. In fact, the Greek word for life is “zoe”. Paul is saying, “Zoe does not come from Zeus!”

Paul says, “There is a mover and a shaker of planet earth – that sovereign, self-existent, self-sufficient, transcendent Lord is the God you do not know.”

Now why is it important that we understand the transcendence of God – that God is separate from His creation; that He is above and sovereign over His creation?

One reason is that it gives us a proper view toward creation. You cannot deify or personalize the earth as if it were a mother that requires your protection in order for her to be happy and fulfilled. I have seen bumper stickers that say, “Love your mother – earth”.

The elevation of creation occurs simply because people do not know the Creator. So, rather than love, worship, and honor the Creator, they offer all of that love, worship, and honor to creation.

However, if we understand that a separate, superintending Person, known as the triune God, who through Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Godhead, created all there is, then we place our worship at His feet.

God is immanent

- Now, not only is God transcendent, or over and above all of creation, He is also immanent.

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that:

While God is separate from creation, He is at the same time, actively involved in human nature and human history; He is a personal, caring, loving Leader who interacts with His creation.

The Greeks that Paul spoke to, knew nothing of a personal, caring God. Yet, as already declared in the last part of verse 25, Paul will go on to teach the personal involvement of God.

Matthew records the sermon of Jesus Christ, when He preached that creator God was involved in the sending of sunshine and rain, the feeding and protecting of the birds, and the clothing of the flowers. Jesus then made an astounding politically

incorrect statement to His human audience, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 6, verse 26b, saying,

... Are you not worth much more than they?

In other words, you have more value than a bird; you are more important than a flower; a tree does not have an inherent right to exist, but you do! Imagine how Jesus would be quoted in the newspapers today!

The wonderful thing is the point that Christ was making with His audience; that is, “If God cares so much about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, imagine how much He cares about you.”

Verse 25b tells us,

. . . He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things

James 1: 17,

Every good thing given and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father . . .

He is not a distant, removed, transcendent God, He is an intimately involved – a transcendent, yet immanent – God.

Paul goes on to say, “Here’s just how involved He is!” Notice verse 26 of Acts, chapter 17,

and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation

The Greeks believed they were a special master race. Paul says, “You originated from the same man everyone else did – Adam and his wife, Eve.”

The Greeks could not claim to be some special class. They were made out of the same clay as everyone else.

I found it fascinating to read the results of a study by two biochemists at the University of California at Berkeley. The article said that most of the DNA in human cells is in the cell nucleus, in the form of chromosomes. But there is also DNA outside the nucleus – in mitochondria (or mtDNA). The interesting thing about mtDNA is that over generations, it changes at a steady, known

rate of mutation in human beings. Another interesting thing is that mtDNA is inherited solely through the mother.

These biochemists examined mtDNA from 147 individuals representing five broad geographic regions of the world. They were able then to construct a family tree by analyzing the differences in the mtDNA samples. The data revealed a common ancestral mtDNA. They believe now that one single

female was the ancestor of everyone on Earth today. They have nicknamed her EVE.

So, it is not mother earth – it is mother Eve! What a discovery!!

Approximately two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul made the declaration that the proud Greek was of the same family tree as everyone else. There is no special class or race.

In other words, the unknown God is color blind; He is race blind; He is no respecter of persons. No one has the inside track with Him – all are equally sinners and all will stand before Him one day

GOD IS THE SOVEREIGN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PREDESTINATOR

Acts, 17:26

and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation

Paul is, in one sweeping sentence, saying several things about God.

God is the God of anthropology

He made from one man (Adam) every nation.

Anthropology is the study of the physical, social, material, and cultural development of mankind.

Who is responsible for those things? Did they happen by chance? Who came up with those distinctive cultural differences?

Paul, in effect, said, The God who created you, created every other nation living on planet earth.”

Germans are not better than Jews; Japanese are not superior to Chinese; Europeans are not better than Africans. If you believe that you are superior to someone else because of his nationality, it is not so much that you do not understand nationalities, it is that you, like the Athenians, do not know God.

Understand also, that Paul is subtly getting across the message that he is not introducing to them some local Jewish god. He is introducing to them the only true and living God, Lord of heaven and earth, creator and ruler of every nation.

God is the God of history

God is also the God of history. Notice verse 26b again.

. . . having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation

God not only exercises His power in creating the nations, He exercises His sovereignty in ruling the nations. Everything that happens comes about because He either causes it or consciously allows it. Nothing enters into history or could even exist outside of history that does not come under the complete control of God.

Everything that occurs does so under the hand of a sovereign God. There is no such thing, in reality, as accidents. God is ruling, even when it does not look like He is ruling. God is in control.

Even when the world seems full of chaos, God is engineering the chaos toward His purpose. Even when things are falling apart, God is orchestrating the falling apart of those things to fulfill His divine will. The reason we do not think that way is because we have downsized God.

Key verses

- Job wrote, in chapter 23, verse 13b,
... what His [God's] soul desires, that He does.
- In Job, chapter 42, verse 2,
I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
- David wrote in Psalm, chapter 115, verse 3, *But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.*
- In Psalm, chapter 135, verse 6,

Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

- In Proverbs, chapter 16, verse 4,

The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.

- In Isaiah, chapter 45, verse 7,

The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.

- Go to the end of this Holy Book and read in Revelation, chapter 19, verse 6,
... For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

The church seems focused on the expressions of sin and is, at great expense, attempting to restrict those sinful expressions as if that would solve the problem.

By the way, the problem is not that prayer is not in schools. The problem is, prayer is not in homes.

Let me tell you what the mission of the church is not. Now, this is shocking and goes against the grain of what millions of people are involved in today. I do not mind being different, as long as I am biblical. The mission of the church in any generation, is not to remove the outward expressions of sin in a society, no matter how perverted they may be. Sinful society will act sinfully, and God's word predicts that evil will advance, not retreat. Men will become worse and worse until they become so evil that they eventually worship and follow the devil himself in the form of the antichrist.

Our mission, like Paul's, is to shine – and the darker the night, the brighter the light.

Now I am not suggesting that it is wrong to be a Christian politician (to vote and to pray for our nation, that is). One author wrote, "Slouching toward Gomorrah." But picketing, boycotting, writing newspaper editors, getting on the radio, or jamming the White House phone lines and cursing the darkness focuses our time, money, prayers, and efforts on the symptoms and not the solution.

God is the Omniscience, Omnipresent Magistrate

⁷ 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; ²⁸ 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.' ²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ 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.”

James 4:12

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy;

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Hebrews 4:13

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

REVLATION 20

In a recent editorial, Joseph Stowell, the president of Moody Bible Institute, wrote these provocative words,

If God were to visibly show up today, many of us think we'd run up to Him and high-five Him for the good things He has done; some of us think we'd run up and hug Him or ask Him for an answer to that nagging theological question; others might even demand He tell us why that tragedy in our lives was permitted to rob us of our

happiness and comfort. The truth is, we would do none of these things. We would, instead, all fall trembling at His feet as His awesome, mighty, and fearful glory filled the room.

Our evangelical culture tends to take the awesome reality of God and downsize Him so He can fit into our “buddy system.” The way we talk about Him, the way we pray, and more strikingly, the way we live shows that we have somehow lost our sense of being awestruck in the presence of a holy and all- powerful God.

2. We are committed to the Edification of the Saints

Ephesians 4:11

I Tim 4

3. We are committed to Evangelization of the Sinner.

Matthew 28

Acts 2