

Origin of the Idea of God

TEXT: Acts 17:22-31

THESIS:

INTRODUCTION:

1. Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill ready to preach to the Gentiles.
 - a. He stood where so many of the world's great philosophers had stood, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
 - b. They had expounded the great thoughts of their philosophies but now, Paul was about to proclaim the great truths of God.
2. The Apostle Paul began his preaching to the Greeks with the existence of God already being understood.
 - a. In Acts 17:22-31, it tells us that, " Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, *Ye* men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD . . ."
 - i. There the official court sat before him and a large crowd of interested philosophers and poets and citizens surrounded him.
 - ii. There they sat and stood, all heathens, to learn of the unknown God.
 - iii. Far did they realize that God had revealed Himself and made Himself known to man.
 1. He had sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to earth to save man from sin, death, and judgment to come.
 2. God was deeply concerned with the welfare of man.
 - b. Now, just as Paul begins with the existence of God understood, likewise, this is how the Bible, itself, begins as well: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth" (Gen. 1:1).
3. It is interesting to notice that:
 - a. The Scriptures do not attempt to prove the existence of God.
 - b. They just declare that "God is."
 - c. In fact, all preaching has to begin with this assumption.
4. Why?
 - a. Well, look at Paul's sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17.
 - b. They had already arrived at the concept of a higher being, but were mixed up about His true nature.
 - c. So, Paul spends some time to clarify His nature (verses 24-29).
5. The nature of God is constantly re-affirmed and illustrated throughout Scripture.
6. Let's look at little closer at Paul's sermon on Mars Hill.

DISCUSSION

I. WHERE DID THE ATHENIANS GET THE CONCEPT OF DEITY?

- A. It must have been an evident fact to them.
 1. But what had been evident to them had been clouded by their sinfulness.

2. Paul quoted one of their poets: "For we are also His offspring" (vs. 28).
3. Their origination of Deity had been degraded into many gods represented by idols.
4. Paul then tried to correct their false views of God:
 - a. "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" (vs. 29).
 1. Paul was stressing that since we are his offspring, it is absurd to suppose that we are not better than a work of art or that we came from gold, silver or stone.
 2. Man himself is far more excellent than any image found on wood or any other graven image.
 3. We are better than any device that is, better than any internal thoughts, ideas and imaginations.
 - (a). You know, while every man has a concept, a thought about God, we should not.
 - (b). Someone has suggested: "Preaching only revives to life and clarifies what is already in the heart of each man....belief in a supreme being."
- B. This degradation (lowering) of God is strongly pointed out in Rom. 1:18-32.
 1. God's wrath is poured out upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.
 2. Why?
 - a. Because they suppress the truth (vs. 18);
 - b. They rejected the true knowledge of God (vs. 19).
 - c. They are without excuse concerning the knowledge of God (vs. 20).
 - d. They refuse to glorify God (vs. 21).
 - e. They are unthankful for what God has done for them (vs. 21).
 - f. They changed the glory of God into an image of corruptible things (vs. 23).
 3. What man could understand about the True God of Heaven, they gave up.
 - a. I mean, men can look at nature and see more than the simple facts.
 - b. They see that God is the great Creator and yet, they can see more than a Supreme Being behind the creation of the universe.
 1. They can see "the invisible things" of God.
 2. This means at least two things.
 - (a). Man can see the "eternal power," the Supreme Intelligence and Force (or Energy), of God.
 - (1). Man can look at the creation of the earth and outer space, of plants and animals, of man and woman; he can look and clearly see their bodies and structure, variety and beauty, arrangement and order and purpose and laws.
 - (b). When man looks at such things and reasons with an honest spirit, he sees clearly that the world was made by a God of supreme life and Being, Intelligence and Knowledge, Energy and Power, and

purpose and meaning.

4. And yet, they made a choice to turn and worship created things, rather than the Creator.
 - a. Worshipping birds, beast and creeping things.

II. PAUL SAID MANKIND WAS WITHOUT EXCUSE FOR THEIR DISTORTION OF GOD.

- A. The point is shocking.
 1. Man has every evidence imaginable within creation directing him toward God, yet man rejects the knowledge of God within creation.
- B. This is the reason why God reveals and shows His wrath.
 1. Man is without excuse.
 2. Man has no defense, no answer, no reason that can justify his rejection of God.
- C. Therefore, God's wrath upon them was just!
 1. They could know, but they refused to accept the obvious!
 2. The problem was not in not knowing, but their rebellious spirit.
 3. They chose to give up the true knowledge of God.
 - a. They chose to hinder the truth by their iniquity.
 - b. They had the means of knowing so much of God, as to show the folly of worshipping dumb idols.
 - c. Isa. 44:8-10 tells us, "Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it* ? ye *are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any* . They that make a graven image *are* all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they *are* their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image *that* is profitable for nothing?"
 - d. There are those who are informed of the discoveries of modern astronomy, and who yet do not seem to reflect that all these glories are proof of the existence of an eternal God .
- D. And so, Paul dealt with a very crucial question here.
 1. "Can man come to a knowledge of God without Divine Revelation?"
 2. Paul said that he could! "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them."
 - a. Man's inner sense, or innate awareness, and instinctive knowledge of God are strong.
 - b. Man is a very capable creature.
 1. He has enormous power and mental capacity.
 2. Man can reason and grasp that "God is [exists] and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).
 3. Man can "know God" (Romans 1:19), even the "invisible things" of God (Romans 1:20) and can know to such a degree that he is "without excuse" (Romans 1:20).
 - (a). However, man chooses not to know God.

- (b). He even chooses to take the truth that is within him and suppress it.
- (c). Man rejects the knowledge of God that is within him.
- (d). And so, their condemnation by God has to assume they could know!

III. WHAT ARE SOME EVIDENCES OF SUCH?

- A. There is universal attestation to such a FACT!
 - 1. The vast majority of mankind has recognized the existence of a Superior Being.
 - a. Granted that some men do deny the existence of God.
 - b. But so do some deny the existence of the Sun, because they are blind.
 - 2. World religions, with their one or more gods, attest to such.
 - 3. Even well-known "Atheist" have admitted some kind of belief in a Supreme Being.
 - a. On May 7, 1879, Charles Darwin wrote: "In my most extreme fluctuations, I have never been an atheist, in the sense of denying the existence of a God."
 - b. He died less than three years later.
 - 4. The book of Job is a classic example of such belief in God among the Gentile world.
- B. But man's own heart is irrefutable evidence of this fact.
 - 1. All Man is incurably religious.
 - a. Hypocritical though he may be.
 - b. Yet, he is religious, nevertheless.
 - 2. His capability to conceive and believe in God argues the fact.
 - 3. But when man looks within, he is forced to look without and upward.
 - a. He sees his own finiteness and dependence.
 - b. He is forced to conclude the existence of an infinite Being that is independent and to whom he is responsible to.
 - c. We are finite in comparison to the infinite.
 - 4. Every way man turns, within or without, there is God!
 - a. Psa. 139:8-10, " If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there* . *If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."
 - b. The presence of God is everywhere and people cannot hide from Him.
 - c. God's absolute sovereignty over creation.
 - d. He is, ". . . above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6).
 - e. Even when we are overtaken in a trespass (Gal. 6:1) and prefer to hide from God, with God, those that are spiritual restore them because we seek and save the lost working with God.
 - 5. Man cannot get away from the concept of God.
 - a. He is bombarded on every hand with the mass of evidence of

God's existence.

- b. Man's own make-up, as well as the world about him, continually reminds him there is a God in Heaven!
 1. Psa. 19:1-3 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard."
6. No wonder the Psalmists could say with confidence: "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God" (Psa. 14:1).

CONCLUSION:

1. If Paul's pronouncement of God's wrath upon the Gentile world was just, then:
 - a. That same wrath is upon the world still today.
 - b. And, for the same reason.
2. Paul said they were without excuse and therefore condemned (Rom. 1:20).
 - a. They could know God from within and without.
 - b. They chose to give up that knowledge, chose to speak dishonorable about Him, chose not to ascribe those perfections to Him, did not honor Him as the Creator, did not glorify him by their internal fear of Him, did not love Him, trust him nor worship Him in any way.
 - c. How much more could mankind today know God, and are therefore without excuse.
3. Today, we have a Divine Revelation to more fully confirm the concepts of our hearts.
 - a. It can also clarify the true nature of God.
 - b. So, man is without excuse today as well.
4. And, if men desire to give up this knowledge of God:
 - a. God will give them up to follow after:
 - i. Their own lust;
 - ii. Their own foolish & darkened hearts;
 - iii. Their own reprobate minds.
 - b. And suffer the judgment and wrath of God.
5. Paul, in both Romans 1 and Acts 19, has given warning of God's just wrath to come upon those who give up this knowledge of the true God of Heaven.
6. But, we even have a greater ability to know God.
 - a. Jesus came down from the Father to reveal Him unto us.
 - b. Jesus presented Himself as "God in the flesh . . . and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-2, 14)
 - c. What more does man need than Our Savior?