



Gospel Impact – Part 4

When It Puts Everything in Perspective

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, the stubbornness of some men not to read the instructions particularly when they're needed and they're lying on the floor there right next to the box in which all the IKEA furniture pieces came. You know, it can be frustrating to watch that, but it's a forgivable offense. But there are many other situations in which you better know what the instructions say because there are many situations you could be endangered if you don't know what the instructions say. You can certainly be locked out of opportunities that you should have and blessings you should be involved in or opportunities that lay before you. If you don't have the information you're in trouble.

The old adage that "what you don't know won't hurt you." You know, it's not always true. In some cases, of course, it doesn't matter what I don't know. But in certain areas, particularly our theology, it does matter what you don't know. And if you don't know it, certain things you need to know. And that's what's going on in Acts Chapter 17. And I would say that we've got a big problem right up front in studying this passage together. If you've been with us, we've been working through this part of Paul's second missionary journey. You are immediately going to be tempted to distance yourself from the Athenians. I tried to keep you in the sandals of the Athenians last week, and I hope that you don't unstrap them and walk away and try and get into Paul's sandals. You need to stay in that point of view.

It's important because while you see yourself, most of you at least I am assuming, as followers of Christ who if I said, "Do you know God," you'd say, "I know God." I would challenge you that while it is a matter of heaven and hell and life and death, if you are a non-Christian and you don't know enough about the true God to be rightly related to him. But I would say even as a Christian, one of the problems we have, as we saw last week, is our tendency, our penchant, our proclivity toward idolatry, our failure, and oftentimes because of the saturation of our culture in our minds, to think rightly about God.

And instead of dealing with like, what are the effects of the cultural thinking that make us think wrongly about God, today I want to talk about, well, we need to move on and forward and learn more about God. And I would say, unless you're here today and would say I know everything there is to know about God, I would say, well, then we got some work to do. And we have some work to do because to the extent that you think wrongly about God and everyone should just come right now before we go any further in this sermon and just think about that for a second and think, "I admit it. There are things about God I don't understand. There are things about God I don't get, there are aspects of God I don't really know."

You need to admit that you need to know more about God, because to the extent that you think wrongly about God, you would imperil several aspects of your life. What you don't know will hurt you, not just your performance in the Christian life, but you will imperil aspects of your home, your marriage, your family, your work life. There are so many things that are at stake if you don't think rightly about God. And many of which, I will admit, will not come to bear until



you stand before God. But when you stand before God, what matters from that point on at the judgment seat of Christ, the Bema Seat of Christ, I mean, you're going to look back and go, "What was I thinking?" And I'm here to tell you this morning what you were thinking is you were thinking wrongly about God.

So I want us to be able to study this passage, which is Acts 17 verses 22 through 29, and I'd like you to stay in the position of the Athenians and don't just creep over there to Paul's position. I want you to think about am I in some way in need of more information about God. Perhaps not to be saved. Maybe you're there. You got that. But once you get saved, that's not the end of us knowing God. Here's a line for you from the great high priestly prayer of Christ. That's what we call it in John 17, when he said, "This is eternal life," he's praying to the Father, "that they may know you, the only true God." Right? Not an idol, "the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you've sent."

So they need to know me. They need to know you. This is what the Christian life is all about. What is eternal life? Eternal life is me learning and knowing the God who is. And unless you've vetted that whole thing and you're completely there, you know everything there is to know about God, then I guarantee you there's room for you not only to learn, but all the consequences that go with it. In this case, the blessings that go with you knowing God. And so we want to think in those terms as we watch these Athenian experts, because that's what they were. Remember the Stoics and Epicurean philosophers, they were bringing Paul to the experts and the experts were the professorial types in Athens.

So let's pick it up in verse 22. Let's read through verse 29 with minimal comment. It's such a relative term, the word minimal, isn't it? That could mean anything. All right, verse 22, let's start here. "So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus." Now, just know what that isn't. It's not a place. This is a group. This is like kind of the intellectual ruling class of Athens. And if you go to Athens today they might take you to this, you know, rock area that's high, overlooks other parts of Athens and they'll say this is Mars Hill, which is exactly what Areopagus means. "Pagos" means "the hill," where "Ares" means Mars, Mars Hill. But this is the council. They probably met in the Royal Portico or the porch in the agora, in the marketplace at this point. But that doesn't matter. The point is this is a group of people. These are the smart guys.

Paul is there and he is going to address them, he's going to set up his speech in verses 22b through 23. And here's what he says, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." So this is the setup. And it's not unusual, by the way, to have in the ancient world, an altar in these polytheistic, sometimes animistic, dualistic cultures, to have an idol that was one, or a temple even, that was one dedicated to a god that they didn't know. They were very concerned about appeasing the gods. And if they thought, well, we've done everything we can to the known gods, perhaps we need to sacrifice and appease an unknown God, and then he'll stop whatever the pestilence or problem there is, the plague that is upon the people.

So not only in Athens did we have it in Athens, we had it elsewhere. Archeologists have uncovered. Unknown. Unknown God, not unusual. That was the setup. Here's the address. Verse 24. Wait for the punchline, Lord willing, next week. Right? But right now the punchline is going to come in verse 30. But, here he says, "The God who made the world and everything in it." So basically he's saying you don't know the real God and here's the real God, "He made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth." Now, if you're in the Greco-Roman world in the first century you think Zeus is the creator. But, you know, there was a sense in which he's a part of the pantheon. And depending on your theology in the first century and what school of thought you were in, to say that he's the "Lord of heaven," that means something.

Because even if you believed in that pantheon of gods and that there are multiple deities, you're polytheistic, to say he's the Lord of heaven, he's the Lord of all the gods, whatever powers might be. And of course he's the God, he's God of earth, the Lord of earth. That's what God means but Lord is even stronger. He's the boss, he's the chief. "And he doesn't live in temples made by man." And even Solomon, by the way, if you think, well, wait a minute, they had a temple in the Old Testament. Solomon, when he dedicated the temple, one of the main things he said right out of the gate was, we know that he can't exist inside this building. This building is just a place for us to worship. And as a reminder, where your name is set, your glory or your focus here as we worship you is here, but you're not here.

As it says in Isaiah 66, "Heaven is your throne and the earth is your footstool." You can't stick your small pinky toe into the Temple of Solomon. It's like you're not a body. Heaven and the highest heavens cannot contain you. I mean, that's the confession when they're dedicating the temple of the Old Testament. So we know he doesn't live in temples made by man. "He is not served by human hands," verse 25. You're leaving all the baskets of fruit, bringing your animals to sacrifice. You think, "Well, wait a minute. I thought they had all that in the Old Testament." A very different sense of appeasing the angry Roman pantheon gods than there was in the Old Testament, which so often was even just recognizing that we're honoring the Lord with our wealth, we're recognizing the fact that God is the provider of all things, which is his focus here.

"As though he needed anything, for he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." It would be different if you were coming to say yes, you're the provider of things, but that's not how they viewed this, the angry pantheon of gods that they had. "And he made," and we quoted this a lot throughout the series, and we'll continue to quote it throughout the book because it's such an important statement, "he made from one man," Adam, "every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined," here's his sovereignty, "allotted periods," he decided when you would be born, "and the boundaries of their dwelling places," where you would live, "that they should," here's the purpose clause, verse 27, "seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he's actually not far from each one of us."

"For," now here's a quote, "'in him we live and move and have our being,' he's like 800-years-old by the time he quotes it, Epimenides is the name of this author or so they say, it's quoted



as though and attributed to him, and it's a statement that Paul's just taking, not giving an endorsement to Epimenides or Erastus who he's going to quote next, or the book of Enoch. If you think about the book of Jude or Second Peter, there's no endorsement of those. Which, by the way, just a quick moment. I shouldn't say this, I don't have time for it, but I'm sick, so I'm just going to say it even though I don't think I'm sick.

You're not condemning the Scriptures for quoting pagan sources. Right? Just like if you watched Bozo the Clown as a kid like I did way back when, they were reruns by the time I was a kid. But Bozo the Clown, he could say something, Bozo could, that was true. And you might quote Bozo the Clown. It's not as though Bozo the Clown is now a prophet or he's a God, an agent of God's truth. Right? So, Paul, in his homiletical, you know, presentation, just like when I talk about IKEA briefly, it certainly wasn't an endorsement of IKEA, right? Certainly not that for me. I'm not endorsing IKEA. Sorry if you like IKEA. But the point is, it's an enlistment of something to build a bridge. It is a rhetorical device that says here, "You guys say this. This is what culturally people are saying. And here I'm going to say this is something that you should see in light of what I'm telling you."

And in the end, he's going to say, you guys are wrong. I just read a book about how these and particularly this particular passage are a reminder that God is found in all religions. That's not the point. The point is he's going to get to it in verse 30, you got to repent. You got to stop. You've got to, as we saw in Thessalonica, he writes back to them, he says, "You turned from idols to the living God." Right? And you're awaiting now his Son from heaven, who's going to deliver us from the wrath that is to come. "There's no other name," Acts 4:12, "under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." So this is not an endorsement of other religions. It's not an endorsement of Epimenides or Erastus or anything else when we see the Bible-quoting people. And you, some of you, are on the Internet watching these YouTube videos about so-and-so quoted this person and so that person then is a marxist and this person is, you know, is a socialist or whatever, because they quoted the wrong people. Stop with all that. Okay?

Do you want to play the guilt-by-association game? Have I said this before? Do you want to play a guilt-by-association, you will lose, that sword cuts in every direction. Right? We can play around with your life for a little while and find every kind of association that's going to get you eventually to something, whether it's one degree of separation, two degrees of separation or three degrees of separation, we're going to get to a place where you can't do anything. Because everybody is going to have to live in this world. Right? We're going to associate, we're going to deal with, we're going to quote things. All of the connections that we have to what we are rightly trying to present, which in this case is Christ, that you cannot in any way simply say the guy quoted such and such or so-and-so. That's a sermon that I'm not preaching right now and will this afternoon wish I hadn't even said it. But I need to say it, I just don't have an opportunity to say it. But I'm saying it now because I had an opportunity and I got the microphone and I took cough medicine this morning. So many things might come out in the sermon.



And yes, we're still reading the passage. Where am I? Verse 28, "Even as some of your own poets have said," now he's going to quote this Cretan prophet, this is the fifth line from a poem that says, "For we are indeed his offering." "His" is a pronoun, a personal pronoun, and is pointing back to something in line number one of this poem. The subject is Zeus, right? So we know that Paul does not believe in Zeus. He's not preaching Zeus, but their view of an ultimate, or at least a high-ranking, highest ranking, depending on how they viewed the Greco-Roman pantheon, they're saying, "Hey, we are his offspring." In other words we're necessarily subordinate to him because he's got more power than us. And he says, "Well, if you think that he is the one who created us, well, then we would think if we're "God's offspring" then, verse 29, he's using their logic and their poets and their lines to make a point, "we ought not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, or the image formed by the art or the imagination of man."

And of course, idolatry like that has been ripped from the very beginning in Exodus. You can't make idols and think God somehow is going to be there or entwined in that or sitting on that. That's not how we think, God is bigger than that. And bigger, not in terms of space, but bigger in terms of everything. Majesty, definition, ontology. He is transcendent. He's different. He's so much you can't contain him.

All right. Look at that word up there in verse 23. Unknown. Unknown. Unknown God, "what you worship is unknown." So we see the word unknown twice here. You know the word "Gnosis," right? Gnosis is the word you use with diagnosis, prognosis. If you know church history, you talk about the Gnostics. It's the word "knowledge" in Greek, in the Greek New Testament. This has a particle, a negation in front of it, alpha, which is "not gnosis." Right? Not knowledge, "a-gnosis. If I say agnosis, if I say it long enough and tweak it a little bit, you go, "Oh, I know that word. That's called agnosticism, right?" And ag-nosticism means you don't have knowledge of God. We don't have knowledge of God. And of course, the agnostic, if you want to label that way of thinking, it's like we can't have knowledge of God. We don't know God. God is not knowable. He hasn't presented himself. He didn't speak clearly. He hasn't spoken enough. We don't know who God is. We don't know. And is that a popular place for people to be in America today? Agnostic?

If I asked you, Christian, are you an agnostic? You'd go, "I'm not agnostic. I'm not agnostic." Here's the thing I find with agnostics, they're very comfortable being agnostic. And there's a willful ignorance that they have in saying, I don't want to know. And part of it is much like when you have symptoms in your body and you feel like maybe I'm sick and your wife says to you or your husband says you should go to the doctor and get that checked out. And you go, "I don't know, I don't want to do that. I know something's wrong in my body. I just don't want to find out something's wrong. I don't want to find out what it could be. I don't want to test. I don't want an X-ray. I don't want a scan. I don't want to know what's going on. I just know something's not right."

And so there's a purposeful, willful ignorance in saying no, no more information. And of course, the Bible would say that's part of the motivation of the agnostic, saying, I don't want to know. Now, Paul's taking just the word here. The first word is an adjective only used once in



the New Testament. But it's such a common root. Of course, it's not meant to be a unique word, then used in a verbal sense in the next line, what you worship is unknown or noun. You don't know it. You're worshiping this as an unknown deity. I'm going to reveal to you the true God. So you have a sense of deity and the deity in this particular sense, one among other gods, I'm going to reveal to you the true God. So I want you to stop being agnostic.

And if I said, do you know some agnostics? Yes. Well, your evangelism is about you trying to get them to not be agnostic. But I'm not here talking about you thinking like Paul and trying to win your neighbors for Christ. I've done that a million times, and we'll do it more in the book of Acts. But right now I'm here to say to you, I don't want YOU to be an agnostic. "Well Pastor Mike, I already told you I'm a Christian." I get that you're a Christian. But if I asked you, you know God, right? Yeah, but if I said you don't know all about God, and that's what we've already established. You say, "Well, yeah, I don't know all about God." And I say, "So why don't you know more about God?" "Well, I just haven't learned it yet." If I say, "Well, why don't you learn it? Why don't you know more about God? Why don't you have, as we have this value in this church, why don't you always work to maintain a high view of God, get a higher view of God, increase your knowledge of God, know more about God."

And you might say, as many people do, though they wouldn't probably word it to the senior pastor, they would say, "I am fine with the knowledge I have. The parts, the stuff about God I don't know, well, whatever." They shrug their shoulders, right? "Whether whatever it might be, some aspect of God or how he deals with people or God's judgment or hell, or the Trinity or man's responsibility and God's sovereignty. I don't want to know about all that. I'm just fine. Right? All I want to do is make sure that I know how the switch flips so I can go to heaven. I don't need to learn about the wires and electricity and polarization and amperes. I don't need to learn about all that. That's just complicated." So a lot of us sit here today with a purposeful, willful agnosticism in our Christianity, and we don't want to go further. And I would say don't do that.

Number one if you're taking notes. "Don't Settle for Agnosticism." Paul did not want non-Christians to be agnostic about the true God. I don't want you to be agnostic about the immense, just incalculable amount of knowledge that is out there about God within the study of Scripture. We need to know more. I mean, we haven't even mastered what the simple statements about God are in the Bible let alone mastering all the implications of that as we consider God. So don't settle for agnosticism. We don't want that. We shouldn't want that.

And while the agnostics think that, I read one agnostic or atheist this week say your God that you say loves us is hiding himself. Well, God is not hiding himself. Right? Matter of fact, everything in the Scripture reminds us that God is speaking. He's speaking clearly. He's speaking not only in the Scripture, but in conscience and creation. And God is speaking, and he has been speaking. "Well, I don't know about it and people don't know about it." I had one guy last night say, "What about the guy in China?" Listen, here's the thing. I love that. I often think, well, if you're going to complain to me about you not becoming a Christian because you worried about some guy in the middle of China who doesn't know about Christ, well, God



must be calling you to get saved and be a missionary, right? I mean, that's the whole point of your passion, apparently."

Listen, here it is. Let me just quote it for you. Hebrews Chapter 1 verses 1 and 2. Right? "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, and now he has spoken to us in these last days by his Son." And all I'm saying is no one on the planet. Right? And if you're going to go, "Well, there's got to be someone in the outback, the Aborigines in Australia or somebody in some Papua New Guinea or Irian Jaya, or somewhere, there is somebody who doesn't know." I'm saying very few people don't know what I'm talking about. As a matter of fact, when they're signing contracts or writing papers or, you know, even logging in an expenditure on something that they're using like a date, if I said, why do we date our...? I mean, we're not dating any longer our calendars by, you know, Remus and Romulus, right? I would forgive you for not knowing those two. But, you know, the founding of Rome, where they used to date things by that.

We date things by the birth of Christ. Who was Christ? I mean, it's the number one best-selling book in the world, it still is, with all these other religions of... The Bible is the book that has been printed and is propagated and continues to sell and goes around the globe a million times before any other book does. And I'm just saying, if you don't think God is an active God in communicating, in speaking, his Son is called the logos, the word. He's the means of communication. And the prophets in the Old Testament spoke at many times and in many ways. And now it's culminated in his Son and the message of his Son has gone around the world.

God is a God who speaks. And I'm saying that for non-Christians. And I wanted to stay focused on you, if you claim Christ. There's so much more about Christ that you should know, so much more about God's Spirit that you should know, so much more about the Father that you should know, so much about the Triune God that you should know. And God has been speaking through the teachers and the instructors and the books. I mean, he's written a book that people have worked to help you understand, writing volumes. All I'm saying is that there's so much opportunity for us to end our agnosticism about any part of God that we don't presently have a firm grip on.

Verse 24, he starts... That's not much on that, but I'll leave you with that. Here he starts. "God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of both heaven and earth, not served..." And we'll get into more of that as we get to the last verse. But he's made everything. Now, if you watch Paul in this book so far, when he goes to these synagogues and we get a glimpse of what he's teaching, or we can go back even before that with Peter or Stephen or whoever. We don't have stuff like this starting the lectures, but we do here in Athens. Why? Well, because if you're not well-versed in the Old Testament, you have to be. Which should remind you, there's no gospel, there's no New Testament truth if it is not predicated on and tied to, yes, tied to, we cannot uncouple ourselves from the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the foundational information to the gospel.



We got to have the Old Testament and he starts where? With God made the world. Where's that found in the Old Testament. Like the beginning. Right? That is the beginning. "In the beginning," Genesis 1:1, "God created the heavens and the earth." So he starts with the doctrine of God being the Creator. He makes all things. Right? And he says, therefore, he is the "Lord of both heaven and earth." Lord, have you used that word outside of church context at any point this last month? Probably not, unless you've been to England, right? Lord is not a word... Matter of fact, we Americans we don't even like the word. "We do not like the word. Don't call me Lord. I don't want to call anybody Lord. I don't want anybody lording over me. We're Americans!"

Here, listen. I know you don't like it, but here's the true God that needs in our mind to be adjusted to a position of Lord by virtue of him being the maker and putting us on the timeline where ever he wanted. He not only can't be served, but he is the one who gives all men life and breath and everything. He not only makes us, but he sustains us. and therefore he is in charge. He's the Lord.

I don't care what your field of knowledge is or your discipline is, right? The reality is the Bible would tell us that God is a God who didn't make things and walk away, which the Stoics and Epicureans taught. I know today, even if they say they believe in God, well, they don't believe that he's actively involved. God is the sustainer. "In Christ, all things hold together," whether you're in quantum mechanics or physics, or you can quote the Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty, whatever your background is, the reality is that God is a God who says, "I'm maintaining all this. And if I were to turn the switch, you'd be done. I turn the switch on. I turn the switch off. Almost every, you know, evocative expression of praise in the Bible, I mean, reminds us from Hannah to the children of Israel coming out of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar. It's always a reminder that God gives life and he takes life. He exalts and he puts down, he turns the switch on to make people live and he turns the switch off. God is in charge. And all that does is elevate our view.

And if it elevates our view of God, guess what? It makes us really small. It's a word in the Bible we call humble, humble. We get small, we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. And here's the problem with modern Christianity. It doesn't have that view of God. I mean, listen to contemporary Christian music. Most of it is just nonsense. It's tripe. It's Christ is something akin to my uncle who lives in Cleveland. It's just there's nothing exalted about God. We don't think of him as Lord as the one who holds my very life and breath in his hands.

So Genesis 1 needs to be the foundation of every thought we have about God. Genesis 1. Genesis 1, God has created and therefore he is in charge. And everything about everything that there is in this world that he has now granted me, like life and breath and everything else, it comes from his hand. Number two, I'd put it this way you should let "Genesis 1 Humble You." It ought to be the starting point for your view of all theology proper, God has created. Well, I'm really glad Satan hadn't gone after that doctrine. Right? Aren't you glad of that? Did your sarcasm bell go off with that comment? I'm glad that in our culture at least, everyone still believes that God created the world in six days by the word of his power just like the Bible says. So glad. I'd say more than half of you don't even believe that in this room.



We can take all the real Christians and say, "Okay, hey, Christians, we got non-Christians here visiting." I don't mean to say that you sit on that side of the auditorium, (audience laughs) but if you are a Christian here, I could probably divide that group and say, "You don't even believe in Genesis 1, you don't believe in it." How hard has Satan worked overtime in our culture to get us to not really believe the truth that God is the Creator? He is the Father, the provider of all things. He's created everything. Everything is hanging on the will of the Father because he made us. But we're so easily impressed by a Discovery Channel special about some big explosion that operates by some weird principles of physics that we don't understand. But somehow, yeah, that happened. And then this happened. And then the laws of physics were created. It happened, and then it all just kind of tumbled into place because there are dinosaurs in the Field Museum. Right? It's like really?

I mean, let's just think this through. The reality of a God who creates. I mean, the whole point of Christianity is based on a God who creates with the word of his power, and one day will turn the thing off by the word of his power, Second Peter Chapter 3. By the word he creates by the word he will destroy. And he's a God who has punctuated his authority when he speaks by those creative miracles. Because don't sit here and tell me you believe that Jesus turned water into wine. Don't tell me you believe in a resurrected Christ if you don't believe in creation. The point is God creates. He has the power to create. And he had the power incarnate to go and say to Lazarus, come forth out of a grave when Lazarus' innards were putrid, right? When they were sure, after four days, he was going to stink, which of course he would. But now he's going to come out as though he just had a bath. How does that work?

Or a man with a withered hand or a guy who can't see or H₂O that turns into one of the most complex liquids we have. Right? A good-tasting wine. The whole point of all of that is just it's not easy to do. And God does all that with a word instantaneously, with an appearance of a history that it never had. If you want to write that off, I guarantee you this: your view of God goes from here down to here. And we've got to get back to Genesis 1 and at least say that is a humbling experience. Some people still say, "Well, I don't know." Well, we should know and we should get to the place where we trust what God has said. The only one who was there to testify to what happened. And then I would say this: those of you who say you believe it, I would say, do you think and act and believe the God that you say creates the world and is in charge of the world by virtue of him being the creator and sustainer of all things, do you act as though he is that God? "Well, I think so."

Okay. Let's turn to Matthew 6 and let's test that theory. Let's take one aspect of your Christian life and let's think does it reflect the view that you are a humble person living in light of a God who creates and sustains everything and is transcendentally sovereignly omnipotently in charge? Exhibit A. Ready? Let's put it on the table. Are you ready for this? No? Just me? Two of you, great. Come with me. Let's set it on the table here. Your prayer life. Okay? And I'm not trying to make you feel bad about when you don't pray, but when you do pray. Let's say I'm going to take and put on the screen your last decent prayer time, which was more than just a quick word before, you know, your Mexican food arrived to the table.



So when you sat down to pray, I want to put it up on the screen. I got my brain-a-scope. My famous brain-a-scope goes to your forehead. It reads all of your thoughts and it puts them all into words up here. And we get a little corner, little video also of what it looks like when you're praying. I just want to know in your praying what you pray for and why you're praying to God for those things. Follow those two things. What you pray for and why you prayed to God for that. I just want to know, like, does that reflect what we're talking about here of you being humbled under the mighty hand of God, your creator and sustainer?

And here's how I know. Your view of God is whatever it is. Do you think Jesus had the right view of the Father? I think so. So let's see how he told us we ought to pray and see if it has any contrast or comparison to how you pray. Ready? Verse 9. And I know we don't usually focus on this. We get right to the Lord's Prayer, which is a model prayer for us. But I want you to think about this line. This is how you ought to pray. You ought to pray like this. Are you with me on this passage? This is Matthew 6 verse 9. "Pray, then like this." It doesn't mean pray these words or repeat these words and you might have grown up in a church where they just do that.

"But pray then like this," have this perspective, this mindset, these kinds of things. What are the first two words? Our what? Buddy. Did you catch that? Our buddy. Our buddy. Our grandpa. Grandpa's always just loving on us and caring, our grandpa. No. "Our Father," our Father. That's a reference not just to some economy within the Trinity. Right? This is about him being, as Paul put it in Ephesians, he's the Father of all mankind. Right? Every family derives its name from God. God is in charge because he's created everything. And let's just start with that. He's the Father of all, Father by virtue of creation. Now, he's Father, I hope for us by virtue of redemption, but he's Father by virtue of creation to ALL people, every family derives its name from him. All of life is given by him. He gives life and breath and everything.

So, Father, huge implications there for Jesus. "A man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." God is the sustainer of all things. So he says, when you pray, think about this. He's your Father. That's not a sentimental word. This isn't a word to make you melt inside and feel googly about, "Oh, God loves me." This is about you going he's the creator, "Our Father who art in..." my bedroom when I'm praying to him. This is not a concept about closeness. This is not a statement about geography because we want you to think, I want you to feel like he's right there with you. You see, if we were writing this prayer, it would be really different. And yet, here's Jesus saying, "Our Father who art in heaven." A place that right now you couldn't even go. You're sinful. You could not get into the presence of God. And you as a fallen, sinful creature who deserves his punishment, he is there enthroned in this place above all principalities and powers.

I mean, even if there were a pantheon of gods and there are certainly powers that exist outside of humanity. But if you had a pantheon of gods, if it was even right, if the Greco-Roman world figured it out, God is in charge of everything. He's above all things. He is in heaven. "Our Father in heaven." Here's a great line. "Hallowed be your name." How many times did you use that word this month? Unless you're looking at the Lord's Prayer, you probably didn't. What were you doing? I was hallowed. Hallowed out there, man. Well, I've



said Halloween, right? I don't hallowed. Think about this. He's just established he is in charge. He's the Father, right? He's in heaven. He's in charge of all things. He's the boss. Now, he's saying, I want you guys to recognize that. I want you to take who he is, the greatness of God, and I want you to revere that, I want you to express that, I want you to know that. He's in charge. He's the creator. And I'm recognizing that. I'm recognizing you as the boss. As the creator, as the one in charge.

Verse 10. "Your kingdom come." Kingdom. Kingdom. There's a word we Americans don't like. Kingdom, why? Because it necessitates a king. We don't want... We're not that, we're a representative republic. We're not into kings and we don't like dictators. "Your kingdom come." We want your kingdom where you exclusively rule, where there's no voting, there are no recalls, there are no propositions. We want your kingdom to settle here. We want you to reign everywhere. We want you and your sovereign control and charge to be in charge everywhere. "Your kingdom come."

As if we didn't get it, "Your will be done." YOUR will. Your will be done. I want what you want to do. Whatever you want to do, I'm praying God, I'm asking that you would do whatever you want to do. Hey, you're in charge because you created us. You are the boss. I recognize you as the boss. I want you and your leadership and your authority to rule over everything. And I just want you to have what you want. How are we tracking so far in this with your prayer life? Is that what your prayer life sounds like? Or do you just rush like I do, like, "God, I got this problem and I need that fixed? And if you can work on that while you're at it. And I got this problem with my friend and I'm really being righteous and pious because I'm praying for someone else and they're going into surgery. So if you could help them, that would be awesome." I mean, we go on and on with the things we pray for.

"Our Father in heaven." You're my creator. You're the boss. I recognize you as my boss. I want you to reign everywhere. I want what you want to be done. I want it now. I want it on "earth as it is in heaven." I want what you want here and I want it now and I want it done and I want you to have what you want. I'm so glad verse 11 is here. Finally my ticket to ask for what I want. Here it is. I've studied the Lord's Prayer before. "Give us this day our daily bread." Yeah! "That's my prayer life. I ask for stuff. So it's okay, it's right there. I don't know what this pastor's talking about. There it is. My license for that." You're right.

Here's the one line about asking for something. I just want to ask you, what is it telling us to ask for? And if I were to ask you, why did Jesus tell his disciples to ask for that? Were they all just impoverished? Was he speaking here to like the, you know, the transients in downtown Jerusalem? I just want you to think about this. Do you think they really had a concern? Like they weren't going to get fed today? I mean, they were getting fed. They're getting fed every day. This was not like they were all just a bunch of beggars and they were impoverished. That's not the reality. He's asking them to pray that you get your daily bread. How many of you have prayed, "God, I just don't know where I'm going to eat today. Please. I'm just going to follow the Lord's Prayer and ask you. I just if I could have some calories before the end of the day, please provide my daily bread."



See, that's not the point. He doesn't go to any big things here. He goes right to the provisions that you probably already have lined up, things that you already have in your knapsack, if you're thinking about the disciples. Things that you already know you're going to have because you have them every day. And what is this? This is a recognition of I know you provide everything, and I'd like you to continue, please. You are the provider of all things. You give me life, you give me breath, you give me everything else. It's like I said, "Give me this day my breath." Well, the only time you worried about that is when you got pneumonia, when you got COVID, when you're not feeling you can breathe. But you don't pray for that if you already have it. And that's the point of this very basic staple of life. He's not even saying pray for a nice big feast and get some grapes and pray for some, you know, some pomegranates. Pray for bread. "Give us this day our daily bread." It's a reminder of God's provision that he gives life and breath and everything. And of course, I pray and I rely on you to continue to give it. "Give us this day our daily bread."

And, verse 12, "Forgive us our debts." How many of you have debts? Do you have big debts? Nope. I did the debt snowball. I'm in good shape. I'm debt free. Well, I got the car, but whatever. No big deal. The house, yeah. Debt. I don't feel much pressure. I got my income certainly covering my expenses. I'm good at budgeting. I don't think about that. Think about the word. What if you were completely just embroiled in debt? Financial debt? Well, this is not about your finances. This is about you before a holy God who created you, who's in charge of everything, who wants things a particular way that you're praying for and you want and you want it done here. But you look at your life and you say, I haven't done what he wanted. So that puts me in debt to this Holy God. And I'm asking now in my prayers if I'm praying like Jesus is, I'm asking, would you please take my sin that I know is a debt before you and would you please relieve that debt? That's a big statement.

And then he turns that around and says, oh, by the way, because he says this a lot when he talks about our forgiveness, one of the hardest things that we can possibly do is forgive the other people around us who we feel like have wronged us. "Forgive us as we forgive those who've trespass against us or as we also have forgiven our debtors." Would you allow us to do that? Would you please, as we ask for forgiveness, we want to do as you command and we want to forgive those who have hurt us.

And by the way, I'm so concerned about my debts before a Holy God, verse 13, would you please "lead me not into temptation? Could you deliver me from evil?" I don't want to keep racking up debt against you, offenses against you. You're the creator. You're the boss. I recognize you as the boss. I want you to reign everywhere. I want you to do what you want. I want you to do what you want here. And I want you to do it now. I want you to continue to provide because I know you provide everything I have, even my meals every day. Would you please forgive my debts that I've racked up against you when I failed to do what you wanted me to do? I will do as you command. I will forgive others. But would you please keep me from racking up any more debt? Can you lead me in a way that is not going to rack up debt against you, the King?"



I don't know. Just the flavor of that. Can you compare it to your last prayer life? If we put it up here on the screen and said, "How do you pray?" And the difference between your prayers and the prayer that Jesus wants you to pray is your view of God. It's your view of God. Jesus knew the Triune God, right? He is the second person of the Godhead. He knew the glory and the holiness and the majesty and the transcendence and the difference between you and that God. And he was willing to say this is how you ought to pray.

I'm just trying to build a case, poorly, but it's all related to our view of God being our creator. It puts us in a humbled position. I don't have time for Psalm 50, but if you want homework here, Psalm 50 verses 7 through 23, a great passage. I quote parts of it often, but just remember, we are not even close to some kind of transactional relationship with God as though we're, you know, we're dealing with a banker or our boss. God is so much bigger. And we need to see ourselves as his creation and not just his creation, but the objects of his grace to keep us sustained every day.

Back to our passage. Acts Chapter 17 verse 26. "And he made from one man this from every nation." Why? And just for the sake of time, you know where this is going, verse 27, "to seek him." Grope. Find him. Right? Feel your way toward him and find him. If I said, "Have you found God?" Again, you're going to put yourself into one of two categories. I'm either a non-Christian and I'm trying to figure this out or I am a Christian, I already figured it out. But if that's a period for you, you've missed the point. Eternal life is to know God, and it's a constant process. So you don't have it vetted, you don't have it wired. So we need to continue to know God. It doesn't mean you're not saved, you're saved. Great, that's great. But now we need to grow in our knowledge of God. And all I'm saying is to know him, to seek him, continues. Matter of fact, it's barely a start when we become Christians.

What's the word Jesus most often used for his followers? The people who were in his band. What was the word? Disciple. Used almost 300 times in the New Testament. Used all the time, like 270 some-odd times. Disciple. If you were to look in a classical Greek lexicon, a dictionary of ancient Greek Attic and Koine Greek, and you said, what is the word that translates into disciple mean, "Mathetes." What does it mean? I'll just read it for you. Here's what the most authoritative lexicon says, definition number one, "One who engages in learning through instruction."

The problem with me saying, "Hey, why don't you this afternoon go out and seek God? Seek God this afternoon." You probably are going to picture yourself going and contemplating and imagining and thinking and sitting on a rock, maybe finding a nice place, you know, overlooking the ocean or in a park, and you're going to think about God, I'm going to seek God. You're going to think about prayer, perhaps. But seeking God is really, if you want to get to the nub of what it's all about it, the whole point of it is that I'm learning who God is. I'm a disciple. I'm a learner. Mathetes. We get the word "mathematics" from it. It means you're a learner, you're a pupil, you're a student. And for you to seek God, if the point of you being put where you are, when you are, is to know God and you think, "Well, I did that when I got saved." No, you're going to keep going. You're going to have to continue to learn as a pupil.



The word disciple is used of someone before he becomes a Christian. We call that phase usually in our nomenclature, we call it evangelism. You become a Christian, you get baptized. We "make disciples of all nations baptizing them." So I made a disciple by having them put their trust in Christ. They learn of Christ to become a Christian. And now what's the next phase? "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." So you got a whole another phase and all that Christ commanded. If I said, okay, after the service, I want you to tell me everything Christ commanded Christians to do. And I'll start with, well, how many were there? If you can't even name that? Think about that.

And if I said, let's start like in the gospels. Where did he start instructing us as to what to do? Right? If that was like, "Oh, man, I got to scramble here. Pastor is asking me a hard Bible question." I'm just saying we got a long way to go to even understand who God is based on what he commanded us to do. There's so much that we need to understand about the God who we say we're disciples of. So we have to see this call in our lives that does not end at conversion, it continues on for you to be a lifelong learner. I'll put it this way. Number three, you need to "Accept God's Learning Mandate." Seeking God, reaching for him, finding him, groping for him, whatever the translation that you might have in that passage. It is about you knowing God better, getting a better handle on him, and to get a better handle on him you got to get a better handle on the way that he has revealed himself in Scripture. Right? "You rightly handle the word of truth." You understand who he is.

Some react, "I don't like that. That seems cold. It seems clinical. It seems too hard. That's what I don't like about this church. All that heady stuff. The sermons last too long. There are big words. And every program we have, even our kids, they're preaching to them for 45 minutes. It's just all this stuff in books and there's a bookstore and they expect us to buy books. On the back of the worksheet all these books are thrown in. And then there are classes across the street. Everybody is trying to learn stuff, It's too much! Too much! Too much! I just want to love God." Great. I want you to love God.

Picture a single gal. She's on a dating website. She's trying to find Mr. Right. So she's scrolling through. She finds a guy there, but all she gets to as she's scrolling through, she sees his hair and she stops before she even gets to his eyebrows. She's got a forehead and his head. She goes, "DUDE! That's it, man. Look at that. Whooo!. That's it." Starts leaning up against the lamp by her bedside at night. She says, "I found Mr. Right." Her girlfriend's talking to her, "How are you doing? How's your dating life?" She responds, "I found him. Look, look, there he is." "Scroll down. Let me see his face." She says, "No, no, no. Just look at his hair. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. This guy's hair is amazing!"

"Yeah. Well, are you going to go on a date?" "I think so." "What's his name?" "I don't know. But here's his picture. Look at his hair!" "That's great. Let's see his nose. Let's see his eyes." "Oh, yeah. I haven't gotten to that." "Have you clicked on his name? Do you know his name?" "No, I don't know his name. I mean, a guy with hair like that! We don't need to know his name! Look at him. Amazing!" "Yeah, but his face could be, like, whacked. And who knows? He could be living with his parents, and he's 30, and, I mean, this may not be the guy for you. Does he have a job? Has he been divorced five times?" "I'm sure it's all there on the page. I'm



not really into reading. I don't like to read. I'm not a big reader." "You mean you haven't even clicked on to see his profile? You don't know what his hobbies are." "Nah. But look at his hair, man! This guy's great."

You'd say of your girlfriend, she's nuts. Right? "Give me that phone. I'm going to research who this guy is." Like you would say that would be ridiculous. Great. You just want to love God. You're not going to love God, at least not the God who is, unless you continue to study who he is. You have to know him. You have to learn about him. And you got to learn by what he says about himself. And here's the good thing, the difference between the guy with the good hair on your dating app and God, God tells the truth about himself. I probably shouldn't have said that, but... (audience laughing) He says it all. He gives you the whole picture, whether he thinks you're going to choke on the data or not. Here it is. Here's who I am.

Some complain, "I wish I knew more, I wish..." Listen. Deuteronomy 29:29. I quote it all the time. But listen, "The secret things belong to God." There are things you don't know. It's like the IKEA instructions. "I don't have what the screws are made of. I don't understand why there are shafts and cams here instead of screws or why this angle iron is only on this part and not on that part. I don't know. It doesn't explain that. I don't know what the composition of this is and what kind of laminate is this and is it made of pressboard. Where was the pressboard made? I don't have all the information. I'm not going to read the instructions. Doesn't have what I want in it."

You need the instructions. "The secret things belong to God." I understand that he hasn't told us everything. But here's the thing. "What he has revealed is for us and our children forever." Even that is a little backhanded slap. How much of this have you even taught to your children? It's for you and your children. Do you know enough of it to be able to transfer this stuff to your children? Are you teaching your children? Are you training your children? If your child asks you what's the difference between covenant theology and dispensationalism? Could you answer it? If he said, "What is it about this whole thing about the Trinity?" Can you explain it? If he started saying, "How is it that God determines all things and calls all people and yet people are free and culpable in their sin? How does that even work?" Could you explain it? We can't even explain it to our 12-year-olds. And I'm saying we've got to master what he has said. And guess what? He said a lot about who he is.

We've got a whole library and a lot of us just simply read through it once a year. And that's the extent. And some of you don't even do our Daily Bible Reading. You don't read through the Bible every year. Well, let's start with that. Let's move on. Wherever you're at, we need to move further because you got to be a learner. You're a disciple of Christ. That means you're learning.

Someone thinks, "Well, I'm the smartest guy in the room. I know more theology than you Pastor Mike." That's great, fantastic, smarty pants. Fantastic. If I could take you back to the fifth century and sit you in front of a guy named Augustine from North Africa. Are you going to say that to him? Probably not. Matter of fact, when he was born, he was so gifted as a kid, his dad and his mom, Monica, was just like, this kid is special. Kid's brain is like amazing. We got



to put him in the best schools. We've got to reach his potential. So they did. And they were working hard on trying to figure out what he's going to do. And dad had expectations and mom was a Christian. Dad was not.

Anyways, the guy gets sent off to school and becomes a Christian sitting under the teaching of Ambrose of Milan. And it was an amazing story. But the point is, the guy had a brain that was so big and he could understand things that you and I just would only hope to understand in our lifetime. And the effects and reverberation of his scholarship still affecting the Church today because he rightly took the data of Scripture and understood a lot. It doesn't mean he was infallible, but he did a lot. And yet he was the one who was known for telling the story of a little kid on the beach who he saw scooping up the water out of the Mediterranean onto the sand. And when he walked up and he said to him, "Little boy, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm emptying the sea". And Augustine said, "It's ridiculous. You can't empty the sea. You could do that your whole life. You'd never empty the sea."

The story goes that he went away from that time contemplating his own theology and thinking that's exactly where I'm at as the smartest guy in the fifth century and certainly the smartest guy in this room. He says this, "I could never exhaust my knowledge of God. I could never. My finite mind could never take in... I could not study the Scriptures and know it well enough to know God as clearly as I ought to. I could never empty the sea." And I'm just saying there's so much more you could learn. And all I'm telling you, you got to dig deeper. You got to know more. You've got to continue to learn. "Why? Just so that I can know more than the next guy. I can win some Bible trivia competition." It's not about that. You know that it is about loving God. It's about knowing God. But you don't find God as a Christian and then like, "Oh, good, I got it."

Verse 29 as though I had time for a four-point sermon. That was a dumb idea from the beginning. But he goes on to say, "Listen, if we're going to quote this poet, quote Aratus here, it's just like if "we're God's offspring," which even your own guys say about Zeus, I mean, we are the offspring of the real true God, "we ought not think that the divine beings are like gold or silver or stone, and some image formed by the art and imagination of man." We can't put them over here in a temple. You can't put an idol up and put your basket of fruit in front of him. Verse 25, "You can't serve him by human hands, as though he needed anything." The real God's not like that. You can't take God and think he's like in this corner.

Put it this way, number four. You should "Never Domesticate God," never domesticate God, which is the whole really point of this sermon is that God should not be in our minds in a little corner where I got it figured out. Tozer, I quoted him last week, Knowledge of the Holy. If you haven't read Knowledge of the Holy, it's a good book to start on, just to start expanding your thirst to know God better as a Christian. I think I quoted page one last week. Here's page eight. That's as far as we can get in our processing of so much of what he said, so convicting. But he spoke about the reality of us wanting God in a particular place in our life. And he says it so well, "We want to put God where we can use him," it's a good way to put it, "or at least know where he is if we need him. We want a God who we can in some measure control."



He goes on to say this, "So the problem with the God of the contemporary Christian," which again this is 65 years ago, "is only slightly superior to the gods of Greece and Rome." Ouch! Right? "If indeed, he's not actually inferior to them for our God so often in contemporary Christianity is weak and helpless while they at least thought their gods had power." I can't even mention the phrase "fear of God" in a positive sense in a sermon without getting someone bent out of shape enough to write me or corner me in the parking lot. "Well, I don't think we should fear God." And they might have learned because someone told them in a sermon because they want to feel so comfortable with God, they'll quote, you know, First John 4, "There's no fear... and perfect love casts off fear."

Context. Look at it. Judgment. "There's no condemnation for those in Christ." Romans 8. Here First John 4, same concept. We're not talking about you're not fearing the almighty God that if you were to stand before right now, you would cower in fear. I mean, look at Job, look at Isaiah. So many examples you cannot take in with comfort the real God who is. And all I'm telling you is we aren't even comfortable with words that make us think that we shouldn't be comfortable with the God of the Bible. And I just want to just say, wait a minute, what are we doing? Are we domesticating our God? Are we thinking that maybe he just can fit into what we imagine him to be? Well he's not a part of your imagination. He transcends your imagination. He transcends everything that you might think. We've got to continually refine and purify our view of God.

We don't give up ground. If you've rightly understood God in a particular area, keep it great. But we build and we continue to know what the Bible says about the greatness of God. I don't have time for this. If I did, I would take you to Malachi Chapter 1. I just would tell you as a homework assignment, if you go to Malachi Chapter 1, just remember this: when you read that passage, which is an indictment, a stinging indictment from God on those people, please remember this as he speaks to the priests. Just know there was probably no generation in the Old Testament that was more careful and fastidious about their right theology regarding God.

And the reason is they had just come out of the Babylonian exile. They had just re-established the Old Testament Israel practices, and they were like, "If God got us into Babylon for 70 years because of idolatry and our loss of a high and lofty view of God, we're going to keep a high and lofty view of God." And God breaks on the scene and says, "You guys might think you have the right theology, but you're not acting like you have the right theology. Look at your giving. Look at your sacrifice. Look at your service. And I would say this morning, look at your prayer life. We have a long way to go.

If you've understood anything in this message, I hope what you've understood is that we really have an important imperative from God to continue to learn who he is. You don't identify with the Athenians because you're a Christian. Well, then you should identify with the Athenians because even if you are a Christian, we have so much more to know about God. And there is an imperative there, because what you don't know about God can hurt you and will hurt you. We need to fix this. We need to be constant, continual learners.



And there is a moral aspect to this. Willful ignorance about these issues and you say, "I'm just comfortable with what I know about God now. Don't push me to be any more into it. All my friends think I'm too into church anyway. I read too many books, go to too many things, I'm out too many nights. I just want to do all that. I'm comfortable with 'Jesus Loves You,' my favorite eight verses and let's just stick with that."

I would remind you of a statement. Albert Speer was his name. And I don't know if that name rings a bell. I know you remember this: The Nuremberg Trials after World War II. Remember that in the mid-forties? Coming out of World War II, the Nazis were defeated. Many of them high-ranking Nazis are put on trial. One of them was Albert Speer. Albert Speer, you may not know that name, but you may know this one, right? Karl Hanke. Hanke was part of the Third Reich's leadership, a comrade with Hitler, and so was Speer. And they were put on trial after the war, of course, for all the atrocities in the concentration camps. And Speer was convicted, he went to prison.

But he writes in his memoirs at the end of his life, later in his life, he looks back at a time when he was there with Hitler and Hanke, and Hanke had been dispatched to go to inspect Auschwitz concentration camp. When he came back, he had a conversation with Speer, and Hanke said to Speer, he said, "Listen, if they dispatch you to go look at one of those concentration camps," because one of the jobs of Speer was as an architect, "Hanke said, 'Don't do it. Don't go there. You don't want to know about what's going on there.'"

Here's what he wrote in his memoirs looking back on that conversation. He said, "While Hanke was warning me, the whole responsibility had become a reality. As soon I heard that, like I knew I had to. From that moment on," listen to this, "I was inescapably contaminated morally." He said, "I had closed my eyes and this was a deliberate blindness. Because I failed at the time and I still feel to this day responsible for Auschwitz in a wholly personal sense."

Here's a guy who realized that, "I should have known what I didn't know, and I had a sense that I didn't know what I should know, and I didn't, I didn't learn. I didn't go after it." Now this is inverted. This is an illustration on its head. I get it, because what we want to learn is something great. What he was afraid to learn was something horrific. We want to learn something great. But the problem is for us as sinful fallen people in our flesh, we think it's awful because we're afraid so often of what are the implications of knowing this God in a way like Tozer did, or Augustine did, or whoever the smartest guy in the room is, like, "What's going to happen to me? Am I going to have to quit my job or give up stuff or be involved in more stuff or I don't know." And I'm just saying this is the greatest thing we can do is to align our minds with the God who is and be a continual learner of this God and not settle in for some kind of agnosticism. We've got to grow, we've got to learn, we've got to continue to know this God who we're called to love and serve. I commend you to that task.

Would you stand with me as I dismiss you in prayer? Pray with me. God, it is hard for us as people who feel so busy. We feel like we got so much going on to think about slowing down in the din and the noise and chaos of our weekly schedule and say we've got to dig deeper. We've got to read with more focus. We've got to explore in our minds things that haven't been



explored. We need to know more about you. We need to know your word better. We need to know what you command and demand of us. Even just thinking about the Great Commission, all that you command us.

We got to know every propositional statement about you in the Scripture. We need to understand the things that people think are impossible to figure out. We got to at least know some things about the Trinity, about sovereignty, about transcendence, about eminence, about all the issues and aspects and attributes of the God who we say we love. And yet we haven't just but looked at your hairdo. God, give us a passion and a thirst. Let us be like the psalmist who says, "Like the deer pants for the waters," the refreshing stream, that brook of water that refreshes that animal, "may our souls thirst after you." And encourage us in that regard to be less agnostic and more informed about the God we say we love and serve.

In Jesus name, Amen.