

In Whom We Live and Move and Have our Being.

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Nov. 1, 2002

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Editor's Note: John wrote this essay in response to a reader's questions about repentance, and the death and resurrection of Christ, as presented in Paul's discourse on Mars Hill, found in Acts, chapter seventeen. Jan Antonsson

"For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:28-31)

John wrote:

Good morning! Allow me to offer something of a running spontaneous commentary on the portion of scripture you're considering, hopefully in a way that may address your questions:

One of the first things that strikes me is how Paul relates to his audience of pious pagans. His posture toward them has nothing like the "us" versus "them" mentality of modern evangelicalism. The fact that his whole discourse has at its heart the affirmation of "we" shows Paul's understanding that all men are included in the life, movement (process and progress) and Being of God. "In whom we live, move and have OUR being."

Paul preaches no intrinsic difference between himself and his listeners, except that they WORSHIP "the unknown God"

IGNORANTLY. We, of a former fundamentalist mind set, may still struggle a bit with the liberal idea of "the spark of divinity in everyman," but here we find something of that thought in Paul.

These philosophers are aware of a transcendent Deity beyond their pantheon of gods, and The Concordant Literal New Testament may shed further light on where these thinkers were coming from. It reads, "For, passing through and contemplating the objects of your veneration, I found a pedestal also, on which had been inscribed, 'to an Unknowable God.'" Note "Unknowable," rather than "Unknown."

Paul finds a common meeting ground with these Greeks at the point of the truth that the true God is indeed unknowable and yet they felt an obligation to acknowledge Him. The Concordant version continues; "To Whom then, you are ignorantly devout, This One am I announcing to you."

Paul has no problem with their conclusion that He is unknowable for the scriptures are full of this truth.

He cannot be discovered, figured out, or explained. He reveals Himself by His own sovereign volition and this revelation of Himself is not merely didactically instructive; it is impartational. That is, He imparts Himself to us, including His own self-knowledge (I Am who I Am), so that we could reword a statement of Paul in Gal. 2:20, in such a way as to point out a principle:

"I know God, yet it is not I knowing God, it is God's own knowledge of Himself in me by which I know Him. This knowledge comes from Christ in me, for you see, even Christ's own knowledge of God is God's own knowledge of Himself imparted to Him, thus the Son knows the Father by the Father's own knowledge of Himself and I, Paul have been made a communicant in this divine mystery." For, "The Father has life in Himself and gave the Son to have life in Himself" (Jn. 5:26). The knowledge of God is intrinsic to the life of God. This is the very economy, administration and dispensation of God.

Paul is so very representative of true apostolic Christianity in that he immediately confronts them with the assurance/proof of the resurrection.

When Paul proceeds to announce to them this unknown and unknowable God, he does so at the point of the resurrection. The very heart of the good news proclaimed by the apostolic church was that Christ had risen from the dead, of which they were personal witnesses.

And they were living testimonies of His resurrection power with such passion that only His real resurrection appearance to them could account for their transformation from cowardice to Christlikeness, so that if one denies the historical fact of Christ's resurrection, his denial would fly in the face of every standard by which we document empirical data. If we doubt the historicity of the resurrection, given the supporting evidence, one must also doubt the existence of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon and their empires.

He is declaring to them that in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God has penetrated the veil and stepped forth into the aion to reveal Himself to all men.

The repentance that Paul speaks of is specifically relative to their ignorance, not their sinning. Understanding repentance as essentially a matter of turning from sin is a fundamentalist hang-up. When men are given a change of mind regarding the true nature of God as revealed in Christ, the issue of sin is cleared up.

Repent literally means to have a change of mind, and we can only have that change of mind as we are granted it. You will recall that the scripture speaks of God GRANTING repentance to the Gentiles. Repentance is a gift of grace. Again the Concordant version offers a marvelous insight in this regard. Where other versions speak of giving assurance to all men or furnishing proof to all men, the Concordant renders it as "tendering faith to all, raising Him from among the dead--" (vs. 31).

It is in this context that the apostle declares that God has, in times past winked at men's ignorance, but now commands all men everywhere to repent. I am not a language expert, but it seem clear that the tense speaks of the initiation of a command which continues on until all men are brought to repentance and faith.

Recently Jan Antonsson sent me a marvelous writing by A. P. Adams (See Link at End), where he strikes a mighty blow against a supposed exclusivity found in the language of the Gospel of John. I have always been struck by the parallel messages of John and Paul written in uniquely different styles. Adams clearly shows that the correct translation of the "golden verse of the Bible," John 3:16 should be, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that all believing in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The choice of the translators to use "whosoever" rather than "all" is totally unsupported in the light of the vast majority of the times when the same Greek word is translated as "all" elsewhere, and by the fact that John records in that same Gospel Jesus all-inclusive declaration regarding the redemptive effect of His death. He said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw (Greek "drag") all men unto me. This spake He of the manner of death by which He should die" (Jn. 12: 32,33).

Drawing all men to Himself is clearly a metaphor for bringing all men to saving faith by the attracting, dragging force of sacrificial, redeeming love in action on the cross.

I would welcome further dialogue on this. This form of "the communion of the saints" is so mutually stimulating and edifying that I give myself to it as often as I can.

Rejoice, He lives,  
John