

THE UNKNOWN GOD

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God's word contains numerous examples of men offering vain worship to Him. The first such example is Cain, who worshiped God in an *unauthorized* manner (Gen 4:3-7; 1 John 3:4,12). Nadab and Abihu worshiped God in a manner "which he commanded them not" (Lev 10:1). Two kings, Saul (1 Sam 13:8-14), and Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:26-33), were notorious for their unauthorized worship of God. The Pharisees' worship was in vain because they were teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt 15:9). Yet many people falsely worship God out of sheer and utter ignorance. Jesus told a woman of Samaria, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). The apostle Paul taught the idolatrous Athenians, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). God will not tolerate ignorant worship (Acts 17:30). Therefore, we need to know Who we worship.

God is Creator

The basic difference between the true and living God and all other objects of worship is captured in these words from Psalm 96:5: "For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens." Isaiah 44:20 describes those who worship objects made by their own hands: "A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Israel was warned not to learn the idolatrous ways of the Gentiles, because their customs were vain (Jer 10:1-5). There is none like God (Jer 10:6), because He alone is Creator. "But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens" (Jer 10:10-11). Romans 1:18-25 describes the anger God has towards men who do not glorify Him as God, by worshiping and serving the creation *alongside* the Creator. We must choose to worship and serve God *only* (Matt 4:10). Men are part of the creation and not to be venerated (Acts 14:11-15), a major reason why terms such as "Reverend," "Father," and "Master" are reserved strictly for God (Psa 111:9; Matt 23:7-12). Angels are also created beings (Heb 1:7), and not worthy of worship (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9). Paul called the men of Athens to turn away from worshiping idols to the "God that made the world and all things therein" (Acts 17:24).

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God is a Spirit

The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well revealed her ignorance of God when she said to Jesus, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (John 4:20). Her basic question was about which *physical location* is the correct one for worshiping God. Did God dwell in the mountain of Samaria, or did He dwell in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem? Christ pointed out that neither location was the right answer (John 4:21), and her problem was basic ignorance of God's nature (John 4:22). God is not a physical being and is not to be worshiped in a physical manner. Christ said, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). Paul similarly taught that the Lord of heaven and earth "dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:24-25).

God is Near

Although so many people today continue to worship in ignorance, there remains hope for all. That hope is based in eradicating our ignorance with knowledge and understanding from God's word about our Creator. We have been given "all things that pertain unto life and godliness, *through the knowledge of him* that hath called us to glory and virtue," a knowledge which will enable us to escape the corruption of this world and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4). God has created of one blood all nations of men "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be *not far from every one of us*" (Acts 17:27). God is looking down from heaven to see if any one is seeking Him (Psa 14:2; 53:2). He is seeking for *true* worshipers (John 4:23). He is even willing to delay the end of this world to bring a soul to repentance (2 Pet 3:7-9). God promises that every one that seeks will find (Matt 7:7-8). He will draw near to all who draw near to Him (James 4:8). However, those who choose to remain in ignorance of their God will one day partake of His eternal vengeance (2 Thes 1:7-9). "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent*" (Acts 17:30-31).