

## God's Cure for Man's Religion

† Proclaim the “UNKNOWN GOD.” (vv.22-23)

† Seek beyond humanity. (vv.24-28)

† Repent for the resurrection. (vv.29-31)

In the name of Jesus, Lord and Savior of all, dear worshipers of the UNKNOWN GOD:

Most of us are too young to remember travel before planes, trains and automobiles. But again this year the great escape is on “up north,” far from the hustle and bustle of the city. Even business travelers expect a high degree of comfort. For instance it used to take several months on a mule for Christian missionaries to reach the heart of China. But Mao Zedong's zeal for communism paved roads and airports, and ran rails to the interior. Today the Gospel flies with Christian businessmen and women.

Looking back on the Missionary Journeys of the Apostle Paul, it's a wonder that he travelled at all. Roman roads had connected much of the Empire, but walking was all there was – except for crossing water on sailing ships. One such ship sailed Paul and Silas to Europe. Beaten and jailed in Philippi, driven out of town by riots in Thessalonica and Berea, you could have expected a trip to Athens to give the man some rest. After all, Silas and Timothy needed to catch up. But Paul was a doctor with the greatest medicine. He had to help where he could with **God's Cure for Man's Religion**.

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“The more things change, the more the stay the same.” You know how you can tell? Watch the news. Listen to newscasters like Brian Williams seriously asking what we've done to cause the outbreak of tornados. Listen to other talking heads wondering about last week's Doomsday prediction: “Are you ready?” Answer: “How do you get ready?” Environmentalists who consider themselves the educated elite seriously worry about angering “Mother Earth.” Some call her by the ancient Greek name *Gaia*. They prefer an evolutionist's tale to God's truth about how to escape the coming wrath.

Paul, the ancient traveler, saw similar superstition all over Athens. Altars, altars everywhere, and not a drop to drink of real comfort and peace. In fact, the Athenian Greeks were so nervous they might have missed and angered some deity that they made sure they covered all their bases. Speaking up “*in the marketplace day by day*,” Paul soon found himself debating with Greek philosophers all the way to the Areopagus where everyone traded the latest ideas. There Paul *stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”*

Do you think he had their attention? One of the great skills the Lord gave His Apostle Paul for spreading God's Word was the ability to reach people where they are with God's truth. He started with something familiar, then moved on to what no one can know unless God reveals it. People in our culture are more and more like the ancient Greeks. Watch a few episodes of *Jay Walking* where Jay Leno is asking people on the street some very basic questions about the Bible. You quickly see how few went to Sunday School. **God's Cure for Man's Religion** can fix that. **Proclaim the “UNKNOWN GOD”** and...

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Any teacher or engineer knows that in order to build or learn anything, you have to get beyond the printed page and think in the abstract. Lines and numbers can give the electrical schematics of a machine or the outlines and dimensions on a building. But you need to see it in your mind's eye in order to make it a reality that you can feel and touch. When the academics of your classroom finally reach the reality of your students' lives, you know you've made a positive impact.

So it is with **God's Cure for Man's Religion**. Only here we have to go the other way, from what we can see and feel to what only God and the eyes of faith can see. We have to **Seek beyond humanity**.

Imagine being invited to the White House as the Memorial Day speaker. Then to all the powerful government officials and Joint Chiefs of Staff over our superpower military, you lecture on the impotence of man and how each of us will stand helpless before the almighty Judge. That's how Paul prepped the Athenians. Within sight of the Areopagus was one of the most beautiful temples of the ancient world, built for Athena. She was worshiped as the patron goddess of Athens, also of wisdom, warfare, divine intelligence, and crafts. For Paul to proclaim that the UNKNOWN GOD did not live in handmade temples, or need anything from human hands was shocking enough. But to say that thinking of the godhead in technical, artisan terms was wrong – this must have shook the Athenians. To penetrate their core Paul only needed to declare the coming judgment by the God who conquered death. When we think how we too will stand someday before God without our good works or position, we know what helpless means.

Ever wonder why you weren't born in ancient Greece? As a boy, I thought about what it would have been like to live through the turn of the century into the 1900's. But I never looked the other direction to realize I'd get to pass from one millennium to the other in 1999-2000. I wondered what it would have been like to live in other parts of America, but couldn't imagine I'd get to teach and travel in China. How could our tiny minds and turned in hearts ever find a **Cure for Man's Religion**?

According to what God told the Athenians through Paul, here's what God did to help: *“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”* God is everywhere, all around and in us all. He put us in this time and place to **Seek Him beyond humanity**.

### ✠ Repent for the resurrection. (vv.29-31)

Every time you read the obituaries, hear about another deadly storm, or see how quickly your own body ages, you get another dose of reality for why **Man's Religion** needs a cure. And God has a miracle **Cure for Man's Religion**. Whether we have socialized medicine or get to choose and pay as you go, it is what my doctor told me at my last physical: “We're just holding off the inevitable.” He's a Christian. He can tell it like it is. So can everyone who takes God's medicine.

Intellectuals in Athens then or America today find this hard to swallow. And you can't give it intravenously. It has to go through the ears into the heart, soothing the mind to be confessed with the mouth. False gods ancient or modern, whether made of stone or gilded in coins and real estate cannot deliver from **Man's Religion** of death. All who trust in their own intelligence and skill, or put their faith in their own resources will come up short when it counts the most. None of these created things impress the Creator. But God's Son does. Jesus is the Lord's Christ who came to live and die and live again for all. Christ raised us in the “first resurrection” when He gave us new life in the Word-powered water of Baptism. (Titus 3:5-7) This was all God's doing and His desire. And that brings real comfort to your soul.

If a dear childhood friend showed up at your door with the title for a place on a private lake up north, would you trust him? What if he had always lived nearby? What if he had rescued you and your family from a fire that scarred him for life? Could you trust the wounds of a friend? Maybe his great gift would make you feel guilty and confess some mean thing you did as a kid. But what if he just smiled and said, “Ah, forget it! Here's your title. Take it. We'll live side-by-side forever.” That's what you get from the UNKNOWN GOD, now that you know Him through His Son Jesus Christ. All God really wants is to be the love of your life forever. And forever is how long He plans to love you. Amen.