

What Matters In the Light of Eternity:
 "God Matters"
 Acts 17:22-28

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
 It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
 It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity.

What Charles Dickens said of Europe in the eighteenth century could be said of religion in the twenty-first century. In short, the world is polarizing over religion. It is getting both more and less religious at the same time and that's what I would like to talk about today.

When the Apostle Paul walked among the idols on Mars Hill in Athens, he found an altar dedicated "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." And when he gets a chance to address the crowd, he says, "*Now, what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you*" (Acts 17:23).

GOD IS.

God exists. God is more than a figment of our imagination; God is the essence of all being. The Bible begins with these words, "*In the beginning God...*" The Bible ends with the affirmation that the "*Lord God Omnipotent reigns forever and ever.*" In between we get glimpses of the true nature of God. God is great. God is good. God is merciful. God is kind. God is just. God is holy. God is.

The God who is, acts. "*The God who made the world and everything that is in it is the Lord of heaven and earth,*" says Paul in Verse 24.

A great debate still rages in our day over the origin of the universe. On the one hand there are fundamentalist Christians who insist that the whole thing started a little over 6,000 years ago when God in six, twenty-four hour periods, created the world and everything that is in it. Bertrand Russell, on the other hand, called the origin of the universe an accidental collection of atoms coming together over billions of years.

Is rigidity a way to interpret poetry and is chance a way to explain the precision of the universe? Is there not another way? If we believe God exists, then our own view of the universe gives us a basis for believing that God was at work in creation. If we believe in God, then the big bang theory is not mysterious. If we believe in God, then the fine tuning of the universe is understandable, and the laws of nature explainable. Since God made us we are able to form true beliefs

and knowledge. Since God exists, our intuitions about the meaningfulness of life can be trusted. The beauty of the earth can be celebrated.

“We believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth.” When we believe, we see His handiwork in the stars at night and His majesty in the winds by day. When we believe, we celebrate order and design and purpose and meaning. The God who is, acts in the work of creation.

GOD IS PERSONAL, loving, relational, righteous, just.

In Verse 29 we read, “Therefore *since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill.*” Instead “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.*”

“We believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

Jesus came to forgive our sins. When wrong is done, somebody has to pay; that is a fact of life. A couple of years ago, my neighbor’s car managed to roll itself off the steep driveway, down the street and right through my garage, taking out one whole wall. Obviously there was damage done, costs involved. Someone would have to take the hit and bear the cost.

I could have blamed the car, after all, it appeared to take off on its own, but it’s hard to collect from steel and plastic or get much money out of a wrecked car. I could have said, “Accidents happen, thank God nobody was hurt, I’ll just cover the damage,” but I didn’t do that. The owner of the car had to bear the cost though he was not around when the accident happened.

We are God’s children, the sheep of his pasture, and when it comes to sin, God came to take the hit for us so “*that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.*”

Jesus came to show us the way. We live in an age of relativity. Nothing is absolute; there is a wave of thought that affirms no one person should impose their moral values on others, because everyone has the right to find truth inside him or herself. You choose your ethics and I’ll take mine and people will live happily ever after. Will we?

In trivial matters we can agree to disagree. I may think a suit is appropriate attire for worship and you may prefer jeans. What difference does it make in the light of eternity? I may like rock music and you may prefer hymns. We can live together with those differences. But what about the weightier matters of life? Why do we believe that napping babies is bad, starving the poor is wicked,

buying and selling each other is depraved? If there is no God, there can be no good reason to be kind, loving, or work for peace?

We all live as if it is better to seek peace instead of war, tell the truth instead of lying, to care and nurture rather than destroy. But if the cosmic bench is empty, who is there to say what is right and what is wrong? Is not our concept of God or lack thereof at the root of much moral mush of our day? There is no outside source saying this is the way, walk ye in it. If all cultures are relative, then so is the idea of universal human dignity. Our world cannot survive on situation ethics. Some things are right and some things are wrong regardless of your feelings about them. Jesus came to forgive you completely and fulfill you eternally. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

GOD IS PRESENT. Here, amongst us, with us, in us, in front of us, beside us, behind us. *“For in him we live and move and have our being”* (Verse 28).

I believe in the Holy Spirit who gives us the universal church and the communion of saints. It is the Holy Spirit who assures us of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

When I get scared I sing. My singing sometimes frightens other people, but it comforts me. When I can't remember the words, I make them up as I go along. I've been doing that for a lifetime.

I remember lying on a gurney in a hospital corridor waiting for yet another test when the hopes and fears of all the years began to close in upon me. As I became anxious about my lot in life, I began to sing,

My God and I go down this road together,
We walk and talk as good friends should and do,
He takes my hand and whispers in the shadows,
My God and I, are going to see this through.

As I drifted off into that spiritual conversation, an orderly came by and said, “Sir, are you all right?” To which I replied, “Wonderfully so.” That's what a personal relationship with the living God can do for you.

We do our greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them undimmed and undiminished, that noble concept of God which we have received from generations past. This is no time for retreat. It is a season for reasonable people to stand strong for faith, pledging our allegiance to God the Father Almighty, made known to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and forever present with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God!

Amen and Amen.