

It Is Written

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THE ACTS 17 APPROACH TO GOD

By Doy Moyer

Acts 17 provides a framework for some basic understanding of God. Think especially about the phrase in verse 25: “as though He needed anything.”

In that phrase is found the essence of who God is. God needs nothing more to be complete or to function with the highest possible reason and power. He is not dependent upon anyone or anything else. God claimed to be “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14; cf. John 8:58), which, among other ideas, indicates that He is self-sufficient, self-sustaining, eternal, and needs nothing else to function and thrive. None is greater than He (cf. Hebrews 6:13). All glory goes to Him.

This highlights what is often thought of as the classical attributes of God. God does not need various parts to function. He doesn’t need to be assembled from the outside, as if there could be any greater who could do that. God is perfect and complete as He is, as He has always been. This may go beyond our ability to grasp, but would we want a God who is less than this? There is something incomprehensible about God, but this is also what makes God so amazing. He is beyond our full grasp, yet He made us, reached out to us, and provided a way back to Him even after we have rejected Him in our sins. He made Himself known to us in a particular way through Jesus that allows us to draw near to Him. He is not far from us.

God needs nothing. We cannot take anything away from Him to make Him less than He is, and we cannot add anything to Him to make Him more than He is. With that in mind, notice what Paul emphasizes about God in Acts 17:22-31.

1. God made the world and everything in it. He is the Creator (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-5) and therefore is the One on whom all things depend. His existence does not depend on us, but ours on Him.

2. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is the authority over all, ruling heaven and earth. As Creator, He has the right to command and expect obedience. He owns it all. He is not owned by anyone, controlled by anyone, or amenable to any higher power. He alone is Lord.

3. He does not dwell in temples made with hands. God cannot be contained by anything made by our hands. God’s existence is not dependent upon something humans can fashion and build (cf. also I Kings 8:27, Isaiah 66:1-2; Acts 7:47-50). He is not served by human hands. This does not mean that we do not try to serve God with our talents and time, but that, again, God is not dependent upon what we do with our hands. There is nothing we can offer that will make God better or help Him in ways that He could not be otherwise served.

4. As though He needed anything. This circles back to our starting point for understanding Paul’s argument. This implies that there are other reasons for which we were made than to add something to God’s nature. This also points in the direction of God’s love and grace. He made us out of His loving nature to reflect His image, and it is out of grace, not need, that He desired to make creatures to share in fellowship and dominion. He made what He made because He wanted to, not because He needed to.

5. He gives life, breath, and all things. He is the cause of all that is living. All creatures, human and animal, owe their existence and life to God. In providing life, He provides for all that is necessary for life, both physically and spiritually.

6. He made the nations from one and determined their boundaries. God is in charge of the nations (cf. Dan 2:21; 4:34-35). Two things will stand out here: God has authority over all humanity, and humanity is accountable to Him. Why? Paul continues

7. He made man to seek Him and find Him, and He is not far from us. God has made Himself accessible, for it is in Him that we live, move, and exist. Yet in seeking God, we must realize that He is not like images formed by human thought and skill. Our thoughts cannot contain God any more than what we make with our hands. Our task is to seek, find, and glorify God.

8. God is the Judge of all the earth and commands all to repent. He has the authority to command and the right to hold us accountable. He demonstrated this by raising Jesus from the dead. The time is coming.

There is so much more to be explored in Scripture, but Acts 17 serves as a solid starting point for both our own understanding and how we may begin to approach a culture that does not know the true and living God.

Flawed Logic from Marilyn Vos Savant

By Floyd Chappellear, 2002

"I am accepting of people of all sexual orientations, but the following point was made to me recently: 'Gay people cannot be normal. If everyone were gay starting tomorrow, the human race would die out, so being gay cannot be nature's intended way.' I'm having trouble finding a logical counter-argument. Do you know one?" — Gordon, Herndon, Va.

Marilyn's answer: *"Yes. The original argument is defective. Substitute the word 'male' for 'gay,' and you'll see the flaw: 'Male people cannot be normal, if everyone were male starting tomorrow, the human race would die out, so being male cannot be nature's intended way' Or you could substitute the word 'female.' In either case, the argument makes no sense: Being male or female is perfectly normal."* [Parade Magazine, April 7, 2002]

The reason the argument makes no sense is that the reasoning is flawed. "Gay" does not refer to gender, as such, but to a kind of sexual activity (homosexual: same-sex with same-sex). Homosexuals are both male and female. They could reproduce should their preference be in that direction. However, if all were males (or females) then it would not be possible to bear offspring. Hence, that which describes activity is made equal to that which refers to gender. If all were males it would be impossible to reproduce. If all were "gay" it would still be possible to have children. She compares apples with oranges.

The real problem is that homosexuality is a sin. "And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet" (Romans 1:27). We need to be "accepting" of them in that we need to love them and reach out to them with the gospel. We do not, however, need to love the garment stained by sin. "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23).

A further problem is that Marilyn has joined that large unwashed crowd that wants us to overlook sin in the name of tolerance. I, for one, might be more inclined to be tolerant if the "tolerance advocates" were more tolerant to views that do not coincide with theirs.