

Thank you very much for your responses to the **Home Group** survey last Sunday. There are more copies available. As a staff we have started processing your input. We will be shaping home group offerings around the responses that you provided. So far, we have these two opportunities to report to you.

- **Prayer Time** – this Wednesday for *Truth & Reconciliation Day*; perhaps a weekly prayer time thereafter.
- **Worship Workshop** – this will first be coaching with Kyle; with the hope to make it a serving group.

Proposition

Our series is called **important things** – considering six essential elements of our spiritual journey. We have considered the importance of the **next generation**; **death’s defeat**; and the **above things** – if we get this correct, we will live it out in meaningful community – think of the lesson of the aspen grove.

Today we consider **the importance of living in Christ** – being “found in Him” (Philippians 3:9) for salvation and for all of life. Our text is what might be considered Paul’s most famous sermon. On his second missionary journey, after Philippi, Thessaloniki and Berea (Acts 16:11 - 17:15), Paul arrived in Athens. While waiting for his team he was “provoked” (παρωξύνετο; “paroxysm”) by the numerous idols (v.16).

His heart was hot and angry in the consciousness of the degradation of humanity, issuing from humanity’s false attempts to satisfy its profoundest need, that of God, with all its idols and its temples....men were worshipping everything, and therefore were worshipping nothing. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, G. Campbell Morgan, Revell, 1924, 411)

As usual, Paul “reasoned” (διελεγετο, “thoughtful dispute”) in the synagogue and marketplace (αγορα, v.17b). He encountered two philosophies. **Stoics** believed virtue was their highest good. **Epicureans** believed pleasure was the highest good. They concluded that Paul was a “babbling” (σπερμολογος, “seed picker” or “worthless person”) as they listened to him proclaim **Jesus** and the **resurrection** (v.18).

As a result, they brought Paul to the Areopagus (v.19; “Hill of Ares” or “Mars Hill” *Roman*). His sermon is recorded in **Acts 17:22-31**. In this hotbed of paganism, Paul presented God’s gift of freedom in Christ.

[1] The pressure of human performance

Navigating life by human performance produces overwhelming pressure. Athenians were “*very religious*” (δεδιδαιμονεστερους, v.22, “respect of the supernatural”) and devoted to many false gods. The stress and pressure of human religious achievement is illustrated by a particular altar in Athens. Paul focused on an altar “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ; v.23). G. Campbell Morgan notes,

Paul saw and read into it the ultimate agony of idolatry; that, unable to satisfy itself with its many gods, restless by the very diffusion of devotion, it travels out beyond and knows nothing, and yet is sure that in the beyond is the thing it wants; and it erects an altar to the unknown god. (412)

Instead of accepting the true God, humanity embraces **pseudo-gods** (see Rom 1:21-25). Though not made of marble, **modern gods** are ideologies that are just as entrenched. Stoics were pantheists. Epicureans were atheists. These worldviews exist today. “*I very much question whether one can find any temple, or altar, or idol in Athens, that cannot be reproduced in the great cities of today.*” (Morgan, 415)

In “What’s Shaping Your Faith?” (*FaithToday*, Sept-Oct 2026, 30) Taylor Scott-Reimer summarized thoughts on AI from Heather Birch (Tyndale University). “*What we are actually seeing when AI hands us an answer, [Birch] says, is not insight, but consensus. These systems produce something close to the average of everything they have read. They do not know what is true, only what is commonly said.*”

[2] The freedom of Christ's forgiveness

When we live by the pressure of human performance, we are conformed to the *"pattern of this world."* However, receiving the gift of forgiveness in Christ opens us to the possibility of being *"transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Romans 12:2). That is why Paul invited the Athenians to consider the Person and work of Jesus – His divine nature and His victorious resurrection – see verses 18 and 31.

- **Colossians 1:15-20** is all about who Jesus IS which qualifies Him as our sinless, singular Saviour.
- **Ephesians 1:3-14** is all about what He has DONE to offer forgiveness and all associated blessings.

Rather than appeasing false gods ("demons"; I Cor 10:20) we must worship the true God. He is the mighty, sovereign **Creator** (vv.24-26). He alone is humanity's **Savior** (vv.27-28). Quoting Epimenides and Aratus, Paul urged all to repent (μετανοειν) of human effort and receive redemption in God as **Father** (vv.29-31).

Some Athenians were **sneering** (εχλευαζαν, "scoffed"); **seeking** (v.32); **submitting** (Dionysius, Damaris, v.34). When you accept God's grace by faith in Jesus Christ, you are liberated from the burden of religious performance. This was Paul's personal story in Philippians 3. He longed *"to be found in Christ"* because he understood that righteousness was God's gift, purchased by the sacrifice of Christ (3:9). Can you say, *"in Christ I live and move and have my being"*? (Acts 17:28) Hymnwriter, Thomas O. Chisholm penned...

O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer
This is my constant longing and prayer
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures
Jesus Thy perfect likeness to wear

Oh! to be like Thee! O to be like Thee
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart

Conclusion – See Digging Deeper

Are you living in the freedom that Jesus provides or the pressure of human performance. Another story from the early church may help. Paul rebuked Peter for have one foot in Gospel freedom; the other foot in performing the Jewish code (Galatians 2:1-21). Paul charged Peter with *"not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel"* (v.14). Peter was not "walking straight/upright" (ορθοποδοουσιν) according to the Gospel.

Then in Galatians 3:1 Paul turned the same challenge towards the church in Galatia. *"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified."* On a regular basis we come to the communion table to confirm in our hearts and minds what it cost Jesus to purchase our freedom from sin, guilt, and death.

Communion

- **Welcome** – Once again, we have the privilege of portraying Christ as crucified on our behalf. The elements that we will receive do not gain merit – that would be religious performance. Rather, they celebrate the forgiveness that has been freely offered to us in the broken body and spilled blood of Jesus.
- **Warning** – Today is also an opportunity to discern if we are slipping back into human effort. Are there "unknown gods" in your life? Instead of humbly repenting of sin, do you compensate for failure by additional spiritual activity? Instead of submitting to God's leading, do you orchestrate your preferred outcome? Instead of serving out of worship, do you fixate on gaining recognition for your effort?
- **Bread & Cup** – We give thanks for Christ's body broken for us; and for Christ's blood was spilled out for us. We should be provoked by anything that would detract from what Jesus has done for us. Let's partake in deep worship!