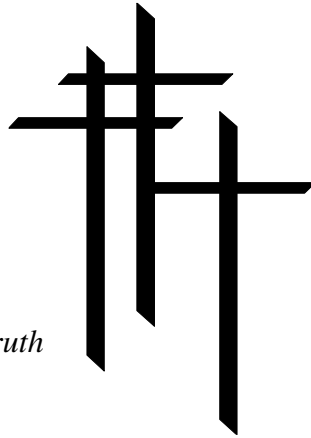


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

Volume 66 No. 11

November 2006

THE UNKNOWN GOD — PART 2

by Gregg Bing

Continued from last month.

When Paul arrived in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he looked around at a city whose people were completely given over to idols (Acts 17:16). After reasoning with the people in the Jewish synagogue and in the public marketplace for several days, he was confronted by certain Greek philosophers. Desiring to understand more about this strange, new doctrine Paul preached concerning Jesus and the

resurrection, they brought him to the Areopagus (Mars Hill), the highest court of the Greeks. What an opportunity this provided for the Apostle Paul. Though the people in Athens were idol worshippers, they “spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). As a result, they were willing to listen to what Paul had to say. As we look closely at Paul’s message to the Athenians, we find helpful examples of how to effectively share the truth of

God with unbelievers.

As Paul stood on Mars Hill, he spoke boldly (freely). He did not hesitate to declare the truth to these people, though they were viewed by many as experts on wisdom and knowledge. He did not water down or compromise the truth in any way, just to avoid offending them. In our ministry of the Word to others, even to those who do not know God, we should not hesitate to confront them with the truth of God’s Word; nothing else has the power to transform their hearts and lives (Rom. 1:16, Heb. 4:12).

Though Paul spoke boldly, he was careful to “walk in wisdom” toward those who were outside of Christ (Col. 4:5). Paul began by saying:

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.” (Acts 17:22)

We need to be perceptive, aware of the needs and feelings of those we minister to. What did Paul perceive? That these people were “very religious.”

This expression is translated “too superstitious” in the King James Version. The literal meaning of the Greek word used here means “fear of demons (or pagan gods).” Rather than criticizing these people, I believe Paul was, in a respectful way, acknowledging their devotion to worship, though he knew this worship was misdirected. As servants of the Lord, it is important that we deal with people humbly and gently. Our task is not to criticize or argue with them but to communicate the truth of God’s Word. Paul instructed Timothy:

“A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.” (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

After commending their devotion to worship, Paul used a technique that was often employed by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry: an object lesson.

Object lessons convey spiritual truths using real life objects or situations which people readily relate to. Jesus told parables, true-to-life stories that He used to teach spiritual lessons. Paul focused the attention of the Athenians on an object they would relate to—one of their own altars—one he could use to teach the truth.

“As I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” (Acts 17:23)

The Greeks worshipped many gods, who, in their minds, controlled every area of their lives: weather, harvest, fertility, music, love, war, death, etc. This altar to “the unknown god” was no doubt a safety measure to avoid offending any god they did not know. The God who remained unknown to the Athenian people was, in fact, the one true God. This is the God Paul would proclaim to them.

Nature of God

Paul first declared to these idol worshippers and philosophers the nature of the true God: His person, His power, and His preeminence.

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” (Acts 17:24)

The true God is an awesome God, much bigger and more powerful than the gods the people of Athens worshipped. He is not a god who can be contained in a temple made by human hands. Even Solomon, as he considered the daunting task of building the temple in Jerusalem, which was to be God’s dwelling place among His people, Israel, declared of Him:

“But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple, ex-

cept to burn sacrifice before Him?” (2 Chron. 2:6)

The true God is not an object (idol) made by human hands. He is the Creator of the world and everything in it, and He is Lord over all He created, both in heaven and on earth.

Worship of God

Such a God cannot be worshipped as these Athenians worshipped their gods. Their worship focused on doing things with their own hands to provide for the needs of their gods: carving images of them, building temples for them to dwell in, erecting altars to honor them, bringing gifts and sacrifices to appease them and garner their favor. Much religious worship today centers on the same false premise: that man must do something for God. The emphasis of real worship should be praising God for what He has done for us. So, Paul told them:

“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed any-

thing, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” (Acts 17:25)

God does not need anything from man. On the contrary, He is the One who gives us all we need: “life, breath, and all things.” Worship of such a God is not to be based on the traditions of men, with its ritualistic and ceremonial attempts to please God. This is why Jesus told the woman at the well:

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)

This is what God desires from man, worship that is spiritual in nature, worship that comes from the heart, worship that is based on the truth of God’s Word.

The Jews worshipped in the tabernacle and later in the temple. While their worship under the law involved ceremonies (i.e. cleansing), keeping feast days, bringing gifts and sacrifices to the Lord, every aspect of this service toward God was intended

TIMELY MESSENGER

Published monthly by:

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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6:00 PM Evening Worship

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Tues. 10:00 AM Ladies Class
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to focus their hearts on Him and His purpose for their lives. Yet, by the time Jesus was born, Israel’s temple worship had deteriorated and become little more than ritual to most Jews. They had elevated the traditions of men above the Word of God. In Matthew 15:8, Jesus reproved them with these words:

THE MAN OF GOD — PART 2

By Gregg Bing

“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

Sadly, this is the case in many so-called places of worship today. People simply go through the religious motions, “having a form of godliness,” but with hearts that are cold and unaffected by the things of God. All such worship, which is based on the traditions of men rather than the Word of God, is in vain. Paul warned the Colossians:

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” (Col. 2:8)

Next month we will see how Paul declares to them God’s purpose for man.

(Continued Next Month)

Continued from last month.

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Tim. 6:11-12)

The title “man of God” is used of several faithful men in the Old Testament, men such as Moses, David, and Elijah. These men had a close, personal relationship with the Lord, a relationship that was evident in their character, walk, and service for the Lord. The title “man of God” is used only twice in the New Testament, both in letters to Timothy, but the title seems to be applicable, not just to Timothy, but to

every believer, including both men and women (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

What characterizes a “man of God”? Last month, we looked at some qualities of Moses and David that made each of them God’s man, but here in 1 Timothy 6:11-12, Paul mentions three specific traits of a “man of God”: he **flees** certain things, he **follows** after certain things, and he **fights** the good fight of faith. We begin by considering Paul’s admonition to the man of God to:

FLEE

The word “flee” means to flee away from, to shun or avoid danger and escape to safety. We don’t usually associate “fleeing” with the idea of being “a man,” but this is exactly what the man of God is commanded to do. Believers are certainly admonished to take a stand in many areas of their life. We are to “stand fast

in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13), to “stand fast in the liberty” we have in Christ (Gal. 5:1), to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11), to “stand fast ... for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27), and to “stand fast in the Lord” (Phil. 4:1). However, there are certain things and certain situations we are to continually flee.

Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, was not called a “man of God,” but the Lord was with him, in almost all that he did. When Joseph was bought as a slave in Egypt and brought into the house of Potiphar, the Pharaoh’s captain of the guard, Potiphar’s wife “cast longing eyes on Joseph” and said to him, “lie with me.” Joseph refused her. He respected the sanctity of the marriage relationship, and he respected Potiphar and would not betray his master in this way, but, most important, Joseph recognized fornication as a “great wickedness and a sin against God” (Gen. 29:8-9). In spite of Joseph’s refusal, she continued to seduce him “day by day,” but “he did not heed her, to lie

with her or to be with her.” Finally, she arranged to be alone with Joseph in the house one day. “She caught him by his garment, saying ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand, and **fled** and ran outside” (Gen. 39:12). Though Joseph was falsely accused and wrongly imprisoned, God still honored his faithfulness to flee from this temptation to sin.

Flee Sexual Immorality

Paul instructs believers to do the same as Joseph: to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). This sin has plagued believers, both men and women, throughout history and continues to do so in our increasingly permissive society.

David, who was called a “man of God” and described by God as “a man after My own heart,” committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most faithful soldiers. He proceeded to murder her husband, Uriah, took Bathsheba for his own wife, and then covered up the whole sordid affair. How could such a thing

happen to this man of God? He did not flee sexual immorality. It all began one night as David was relaxing on the rooftop of his house. He happened to look across into another house, where Bathsheba was bathing. Instead of turning away and fleeing from this temptation, David continued to gaze at this woman, who was physically “beautiful to behold.” As a result, he succumbed to the temptation, inquired about the woman, sent for her, and lay with her (2 Sam. 11:2-4).

The man of God flees sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is a sin against one’s own body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote these words to the Corinthian church, an assembly of immature believers who were susceptible to this sin:

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in

your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Flee from Idolatry

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians to “flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). The Gentile believers in Corinth had come from a background of idol worship. They were continually tempted to return to their religious roots by friends, maybe even from family members. The Jewish believers in Corinth also had a background of idolatry as well. The children of Israel were plagued by this abominable sin throughout their history. Even as they waited at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses was up in the mount to receive the law from God, they made and worshipped a golden calf.

God's first commandment in the law was: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exo. 20:3). Israel was commanded by God to flee from idolatry. The second commandment went on to say: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any like-

ness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God ...” (Exo. 20:4-5). When you mention the word “idolatry,” this is what most people think of: bowing down to some type of image or idol. However, there are other forms of idolatry as well.

The world we live in is an evil world, headed up by Satan himself, whom the Lord Jesus referred to as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31). Satan's greatest desire is to be worshipped as God (cf. Isa. 14:12-14), which is clearly idolatry. To accomplish this goal, Satan uses the things of this world to corrupt men's minds and turn them away from the worship of the one true God (2 Cor. 11:3). John warned of the danger of succumbing to the lure of the things of the world:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves

the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)

We must not develop a love for the world or for the things in it. The world appeals to sinful men in their weakest areas: the lusts (desires) to satisfy our bodies of flesh, the lust for things we see with our eyes, and the selfish pride that is a fundamental part of our sin nature. Paul listed the types of sins we can commit in “our members (bodies) which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). These sins draw us away from the Lord. Notice the last sin mentioned is covetousness.

The word *covetousness* means greediness, a desire to have more. A covetous person is never content; he always wants more, often what belongs to someone else. His desires may include money or the things it can buy, prestige in the eyes of men, power or authority to be in control, or things that bring pleasure, especially to the body. The Lord led Paul to declare that such covetousness is idolatry. Anything that we place above God becomes an idol to us. We worship (or serve) what we set our hearts on; what we value most highly; what we spend our time and efforts pursuing. In other words, what we covet or desire most strongly. If we are not careful, any of the following can become an idol to us: work, hobby, education, money, houses, cars, boats, even our families. While none of these things are wrong in themselves, if we place them before God in importance, we are guilty of idolatry.

We flee idolatry by realizing that we are crucified to the things of this world and they are cruci-

fied to us (Gal. 6:14). Therefore, Paul instructs us to “put to death” the things of the world, the sins we are tempted to commit in our bodies of flesh (Col. 3:5) and to “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,” for “Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:10-11).

Next month we will look at some specific things in 1 Timothy 6 that Paul commands the man of God to flee.

(Continued Next Month)

Deliver me,
O LORD,
from mine enemies:
*I flee unto thee to
hide me. Teach me
to do thy will; for
thou art my God:
thy spirit is good;
lead me into the land
of uprightness.*

—*Psalm 143:9-10*



Youth Retreat

December 28-30, 2006

This year's Winter Youth Retreat will be held December 28-30 at Three Mountain Retreat in Clifton, Texas. This retreat is for young people, ages 13 through college age.

There will be Bible studies, discussions, workshops, group singing, and good fellowship.

Recreational activities will include horseback riding, a hay-less hayride, hiking, indoor and outdoor games, and the big night game.

A registration form is included in this issue and will be in next month's issues as well, which contains more detailed information about the retreat and how to register for it.

BIBLE STUDY BOOKS

The following Bible study materials are available free of charge for your personal use or for use in teaching a Bible class.

by Charles Wages

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- Stepping Stones to Truth
- Past Pentecost to Paul
- Points to Ponder
- The Ages
- Saved by Grace
- Ministry of the Church
- The Perfect Will of God
- Once in a Lifetime
- Fellowship in Christ
- Hidden in God
- Thoughts on Vision
- Spiritual Fitness
- What Saith the Scripture
(Set of 6 Diff. Tracts)

by Mrs. Charles Wages

- Seasons
- Spiritual Thoughts for Young Minds
- A Man Named Paul
- Studies for Women

by R.B. Shiflet

- Informal Study: Philippians
- Informal Study: Ephesians
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- Giving Under Grace
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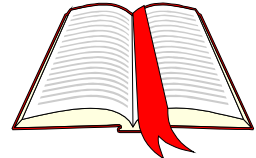
- The Book of Acts
- Through the Bible Dispensationally
- Prophetic Gleanings from Daniel and Revelation
- Saved, Settled and Sure
- Fellowship of the Mystery

by Gregg Bing

- Keys to the Word : Understanding the Bible
- That I May Know Him
- Making Good Choices
- For God So Loved the World
- It is Finished!
- Conformed to the Image of His Son
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