

Knowing the Unknown God

When the apostle Paul visited Athens, the world's centre of culture and philosophy, he was deeply distressed because the whole city was given over to idolatry. Ironically, amidst the myriad of idols, he found an altar dedicated to the "unknown god" -- an apt testimony to their spiritual ignorance.

Sin had a tragic effect upon our fellowship with God. As soon as our first parents disobeyed their Creator, Adam and Eve were ashamed and hid themselves from God's presence. We, their offspring, up to the present time, still run away from God. 'For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed' (John 3:20). Sinners drift away from the true and living God, lost in the darkness of vain human philosophies.

Pantheism, for instance, asserts that everything is god, and god is everything. This philosophy, undergirding Eastern religions and the New Age, obliterates the distinction between the Creator and his creation. But the true God is distinct from the creation; he is before creation; indeed he is the cause of creation and he rules over it. 'God, who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth' (Acts 17:24).

Another false philosophy is *deism* – the idea that God is not involved in the operation of the universe; he is absent from creation and it is futile to seek him, they say. But Scripture teaches that God is so interested in all aspects of creation that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his will. 'He is not far from each one of us' (Acts 17:27).

Again, throughout history, people have also believed in many gods. This philosophy, *polytheism*, contradicts the first commandment: 'You shall have no other gods before Me.' The popular idea that religions are valid may be regarded as a form of polytheism.

Finally, *atheism* goes all the way in directly denying the very existence of God. 'The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"' (Ps 53:1).

Throughout history and in different cultures, people have fashioned a host of gods and diverse religions. Left to our own resources we are helpless and hopelessly lost; we cannot find the true and living God. The Scripture declares: 'The world through wisdom did not know God' (1 Cor 1:21).

By ourselves we can never come to a true knowledge of God. We can only know God because he was pleased to show himself to us.

God manifested himself in a general way by the works of his hand, that is, the creation. Thus nobody has a valid excuse; nobody may rightly claim that he didn't know about God. Furthermore, it pleased God to reveal himself to us in a special and personal way, through his written Word, the Bible. The Bible's central message is the Lord Jesus Christ. Being the 'image of the invisible God', Jesus perfectly reveals God to us. Moreover Christ takes away sin, the cause of our alienation and separation, and brings about reconciliation and peace with God.