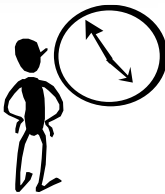


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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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.
7. Why? Paul continues: 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.

“We’re Coming For Your Children!”

By LaGard Smith

“We’re here, we’re queer, we’re coming for your children,” shouted LGBTQ activists at New York City’s annual drag queen parade. Then there’s the feisty, if not terribly catchy, lyrics of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus: “We’ll convert your children, happens bit by bit; quietly and subtly, you’ll barely notice it. You can keep them from disco, warn about San Francisco... we don’t care. We’ll convert your children; we’ll make them tolerant and fair.” Really? In 2023? No generation in history has ever been as tolerant and fair! So, what are you really saying?

Hardly just “tongue-in-cheek humor,” as claimed, the message in the chorus provides a chilling clue: “Your children will care about fairness and justice for others; your children will work to convert all their sisters and brothers. Then soon, we’re almost certain, your kids will start converting you!” As in the Hitler Youth movement. As in Mao’s Cultural Revolution, when children snitched on their own parents if they resisted radical changes. Win the hearts and minds of the youth, and game over. Don’t miss the bigger picture. This isn’t just about gays. At stake is parental authority versus the state, because whoever controls the youth controls everything.

The battle between “progressive” school boards and parents over sex education, explicit books in the library, and students being counseled about gender transitioning without parents being informed is only a single front in a wider war. In 2021, the Democratic candidate for Governor of Virginia spilled the beans, saying, “I don’t think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.” It’s not just the belief that professional educators know better than parents what’s best for children to learn, but about isolating children from parents in order to freely indoctrinate them about every aspect of life—political, social, ethical, and economic.

Shades of Marxism and communism, even Plato’s utopian “city” in which the traditional family would be replaced by a communal arrangement wherein children would be raised as wards of the state. Yet this latest round of statism is about raw power, preaching lofty social ideals but perverting even the moral assumptions of its idealistic predecessors. And when you consider that communism and Marxism have always led to authoritarian rule and loss of freedom, today’s morally-unhinged incarnation would unleash a nightmare of...unfairness and intolerance!

Given these ungodly times, it’s easy to see the potential for danger when young people are under the influence of mentors other than their parents. But have we been blind to a similar dynamic happening even in a godly setting? With the purest of motives and not the least quest for power or influence, youth ministries and “children’s worship” have served to isolate children from parents, and to relieve parents of their own teaching responsibility. The umbilical cord having thus been severed, children’s

primary spiritual mentors are no longer their own parents, upending the educative relationship between parent and child, and radically changing the culture of the church. Well-meaning as it is, the youth-ministry model has made young people all the more vulnerable to militant secularism. Even now, they're abandoning the church and faith in droves.

Passive parents, arise! Having been forewarned that the ungodly are coming to convert your children, it's time to step up. Schools and school boards need to hear from you! More important by far, when it comes to spiritual mentoring, it's not church leaders but parents that youngsters need to hear from most! It's no jest, "They're coming for them!" Are your children ready?

My Father's Hands

By Fanning Yater Tant (1908-1988)

Not God. I am thinking of my own natural father, Jefferson Davis Tant. It is June 4, 1941. A few scores of us are gathered in the old auditorium of the Central Church of Christ, Cleburne, Texas. My father's body lies in the casket before us. W. K. Rose has just finished a simple, moving tribute to the one who will walk among us no more. The casket is opened, and friends and relatives file slowly past, looking for the last time upon the mortal remains of the fallen soldier. Finally, the family is left alone for a few sad moments of farewell.

And what is the most vivid picture that comes to me as I remember that poignant hour? For some strange reason, my gaze focused on my father's hands – strong, calloused, and worn with eighty years of toil and labor. Through half of my lifetime, that picture has not faded from my mind. I remember how the thumbs curled back, and that the skin of the hands was clear and unspotted, contrary to what it is often seen in the hands of the aged, and especially unlikely in view of his Irish heritage. Those were the hands that had held tightly of the bridle reins as he had tamed the furious contortions of many a bucking bronc; those were the hands that had picked wild berries in the hills of Georgia after Sherman's armies had burned to the ground every building that stood on the farm; and had destroyed every vestige of food that could be found. Those were the hands that had baptized many thousands of people into the body of Christ and had written even more thousands of letters (quite often frustrating and unintelligible to the recipients because of their incredible illegibility).

My father was a strong man, both physically and mentally. His hands revealed that strength. They were worn and roughened by honest toil. They knew the feel of an axe handle, the warmth of a branding iron – and the smooth hard quiver of a bamboo fishing pole when a four-pound catfish was tugging at the other end of the line. These were the hands that had clung with such desperate despair to the wife of his young manhood as she slipped so quickly into death after four short years of marriage. These were

the hands that had served both as mid-wife and physician at the birth of my older brother “because we were too poor to pay the \$20.00 a doctor would have charged” as my mother told me so many years later.

They were hands that had given strength and courage to many a sad and weary heart whose owner had felt their tightening grip as he battled with some fierce grief or tragedy. They were hands of friendship, compassion, and sympathy. They were hands also that had hesitated to “apply the rod” (and how he applied it!) to his own children as they were passing through the formative years of childhood. They were the hands of authority – but also of security. Strength was there, and we knew it.

More than thirty years have passed since I stood beside my father’s bier, gazing so intently at his hands. It is as vivid as if it had happened yesterday. Somehow, my father’s hands, lying so still on the warm gray fabric of his burial suit (a gift, incidentally, of John W. Akin) seemed to symbolize his life, a life of fantastic activity, which had known hardship and heartache; but which had been rich in love and friendship, and in service to his Master. They were the hands of a man who had lived his life rather than merely marking time through his allotted span. As I gazed at my father’s hands that day in June so many years ago, I felt the appropriateness of the brief quotation which he himself had selected as an inscription to be engraved on the stone marker at his head: “I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith.” (II Timothy 4:7)

What is the Gift of the Holy Spirit?

By Bill Boyd

My preacher friends do not agree on the meaning of “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This is frustrating because this expression is at the end of the oft-quoted Acts 2:38. The passage is clear that baptism is “for the remission of sins,” but what does the baptized person receive? Whatever it is, it follows baptism, and this has major theological implications. Calvinist-influenced preachers teach that we can do nothing toward our own salvation until the Holy Spirit does a direct operation on our totally depraved hearts, and only then we can believe and be baptized because we are saved. Acts 2:38 is a big problem for them. Most of my preacher friends are not Calvinists, but they still struggle with what this gift is. Several explanations are offered, and I am OK with explanations that are consistent with what the Bible otherwise teaches.

Some contend that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself. They associate this with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 says, “...*ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.*” However, those who think the gift of Acts 2:38 is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit do not always agree on what the indwelling of the Spirit is all about. Some think the Spirit literally dwells in our flesh, but they do not know why and they do not know what he does in there; they just

like the idea that he is there. Others think this indwelling Spirit is putting things in their minds that they are not getting from the Bible, and that is a problem. Some suggest that the language of Romans 8:9 is the language of fellowship because it also speaks of us being “in the Spirit.” They compare this with the fellowship language Jesus used in reference to his Father in John 17:21. I am content with this being a spiritual indwelling that is accomplished by the word of the Spirit dwelling in our minds (See Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:17-19, and Romans 12:2). However, when it comes to Acts 2:38, these indwelling ideas seem out of context.

When the apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were able to speak in tongues. Later we learn that the apostles could impart spiritual gifts to others through the laying on of hands. Some think this “gift of the Holy Spirit” is referring to these miraculous gifts. To their credit, the only other place where we read the words “gift of the Holy Spirit” is in Acts 10:45 where it refers to a miraculous gift. However, in Acts 2 the next verse says, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all them that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). That sounds like “the gift” is “the promise,” and that the promise was to be general and enduring. Miraculous gifts were not general and enduring; so that is a problem.

The simplicity of the next explanation intrigues me. Peter began his sermon with a promise: “...whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). “Whosoever” (Acts 2:21) describes “...you, and your children, and all them that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). That ties the promise at the beginning of the promise at the end of the sermon. Now if “the promise” is salvation, and if “the gift” is the promise, then “the gift” is salvation. That fits the context, it is simple, and it teaches nothing that is not elsewhere taught in the New Testament. An objection is that this makes Peter redundant. Peter had just said to be baptized “for the remission of sins,” so why would he tell them that they would be given the gift of salvation? In response, I suggest that this is not fully redundant; it is expressing different aspects of salvation in different terms. Even if it seems somewhat redundant, such redundancy can add to the force of a teaching. Peter is telling them that if they are baptized for something (the remission of sins), they will receive it (salvation). Besides, salvation is a gift of the Holy Spirit, for by the Spirit we are born again, renewed, sanctified, washed, and justified (John 3:5, Titus 3:5, Romans 15:17, II Thessalonians 2:13, I Corinthians 6:11), and it is in response to the teachings of the Spirit that we are baptized (I Corinthians 12:13).

We may not all be fully settled on what the gift of the Holy Spirit is, but we know that if we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins then we will be counted among the saved (Acts 2:41, 47), and we are sure that all the spiritual blessings that come with this will be ours (Ephesians 1:3).

