

The Omnipresence of God

Introduction

This week we are going to be studying the omnipresence of God. Instead of moving from the perspective of identifying several biblical bullet points about the attribute and then using scripture as a support we will be reading and studying several places in scripture that teach us about God's omnipresence. This means that we will discuss peripheral subject matter to God's immensity along with the attribute itself. I believe this will aid us in understanding the place this important doctrine should hold in our lives as God's people.

A Study of Acts 17:22-28

Acts 17:22-28

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for
"In him we live and move and have our being';

Who are some of the God's that Athenians might have worshipped?
Where did these gods reside?

Athenian (Greek) gods would have been perceived to reside in places. They were places that were temples crafted by human hands or places that the gods would go off to (i.e. Mount Olympus. These gods themselves were born from something

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beyond themselves. They were needy. They required nourishment, admiration, and pleasure. The Greek gods were finite and required something from man. Into this conception of deity Paul is speaking.

23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

When Paul identifies God as the “unknown god” does he intend to identify God as one among many? What is his purpose for identifying God with the “unknown god”?

Paul is really driving home that even in the midst of all of the Athenian's gods there still remains an awareness of their ignorance. This is Paul's preparation to address this ignorance with truth. We might look around as well today and see a deity that has been setup in our culture.

What might be a sinful religious (or irreligious) construct that our culture has propped up to derive meaning and purpose from? What is something that we have setup as the center of our cultural ethic?

Might I suggest we have setup our human intellect as our god. We have dispensed with the mythological gods and turned to believing that which can be proven to our senses. Speaking of mythology, there is even a show called Myth Busters where the host Adam Savage states jokingly, “I reject your reality and substitute my own.” Isn't that essentially what we have setup as our cultural gods? We construct our individual kingdoms that are fashioned to our likeness and pleasing to our senses. Yet in order to validate our positions we look to affirmation from our culture to legitimize our individual kingdoms. Even though we like to say, “that is your truth” we can't help but look outwardly for validation that our truth is in fact a legitimate truth. In to this let the Christian speak with Paul's words.

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

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Paul is stating the biblical foundation of all existence. God is before all things. He has created all things. All things are sustained by Him. He is in need of nothing. He does not benefit from us. We are in complete dependence on Him. We benefit entirely from Him. When Paul states that God “does not live in temples made by man” he is alluding to God’s immensity. A God of such magnitude could not be contained in a man-made temple.

We can see Paul echoing Solomon’s words in 1 Kings 8:27 during the dedication of the temple:

1 Kings 8:27 27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

Solomon recognized that the temple that was built by the command of God would not contain Him in his entirety.

Back to Acts 17:26:

26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

Previously Paul stated that God “does not live in temples made by man”. He continues to flip the idea of man making a place for God. What two things has God determined for man? God has determined “allotted periods” (time) and “boundaries of their dwelling place” (space).

What does this tell us about God?

He is the Lord of time and space. He transcends time and space. He is the one who determines the ebb and flow of the daily life of His creation. He is intimately acquainted with it. Our place in creation is determined by his active presence. A presence that is infinite and transcendent.

27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us

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Why has he done this? To make himself known.

Romans 1:19-20

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

The display of His work throughout creation is a call to mankind to recognize there is a God and we are to seek Him. Even in our dysfunctional state God expects that we would at least “feel [our] way toward him”. The profound reality is that God is not far. He has not hidden himself from being known. Mankind has willfully turned away. Yet, this again points to a reality of God’s presence. He not only transcends time and space he is near to His creation. Verse 28 brings this all together.

28a for “In him we live and move and have our being’;”

The picture that Paul is illustrating is that His presence is so near that our being is wrapped up in it. Is there anything more near than His presence?

A Study of Psalms 139:7-12

Psalms 139:7-12

7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,

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and the light about me be night,”
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

In Acts 17 we learned about the nearness of God’s presence in reference to His care for mankind. In Psalm 139:7-12 we see a hypothetical contemplation of a place that would be out of the presence of God. It contemplates various places that the Psalmist might retreat to and how God’s presence would be in each of these places.

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

God’s presence extends from where He manifests His holiness in perfection (heaven) to where the curse of death is very present (Sheol).

9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

There is no place in the earthly realm that we can go.

10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

God will not simply be in these places to observe the psalmist. He will be in these places with a presence that is able to exert wisdom and power.

11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,”
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

God’s presence penetrates even the void of dark. Nothing is hidden from him.

God’s full knowledge, power, sovereignty, grace, mercy, wrath, his very being is present in all places.

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Some Special Notes

How can God come down if He is omnipresent?

Genesis 11:5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.

In this case the language is used to denote God's righteous judgement in truth. He is said to be coming down to investigate. As King he is attentive to the activity of men.

How can God be somewhere specific and yet be omnipresent?

Matthew 6:9 "Our Father in heaven,"

Exodus 19:18

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

These are cases where God is manifesting his presence in some way to display something about himself to his creation.

Conclusion

God is fully present wherever we go with our feet or our imaginations. Nothing is hidden from His presence. This has several uses. This is a warning to the wicked that whatever wickedness they do they do in the presence of God. This is a comfort to the afflicted that His presence is near and able to fulfill all His promises. This is an exhortation to our pattern of living. We should be mindful of how He has commanded us to live because we have our very being in Him.