

Does God Need Anything from Us?

Job 22:1–11, Acts 17:24–28

The title of my message today is “Does God Need Anything from Us?” I use “need” in the sense of *require*, meaning, *to demand as necessary or essential* (as in the statement “all living beings *require* food”). Perhaps it would be better to phrase it this way: “Does God *require* anything from us?”

Our New Testament text is from Acts 17. The apostle Paul is delivering a sermon before the Areopagus, the Athenian supreme tribunal and court of morals that met on Mars Hill. Since his audience is scripturally illiterate, he does not quote from the Old Testament. Here were men—intelligent and well-respected in their community—with no knowledge of Scripture, in contrast to the Jews, who heard the Scriptures read every Sabbath day in the synagogues. Paul’s sermon is not filled with scriptural *allusions*, but it is filled with Scripture *truth*—truth important for us to grasp.

We considered verse 24 last week and concluded that God is Creator and Lord, and does not live in temples made with hands, such as the many heathen temples around Athens that provoked and deeply troubled Paul’s spirit. No, God does not live in temples made with hands; instead, he lives in the midst of his people, the church! This is a precious truth, dear brothers and sisters. The reason we gather for worship every Lord’s day is because God himself is present with us! We gather not just to keep alive an ancient tradition but because the living Savior promises us, “lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” God does not live in manmade temples but in the midst of his *church*. This is the place to be if you want God’s blessing!

1. God is in need of nothing.

Today our exposition begins with verse 25, where Paul says, “Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” The word for “worshiped” in this verse is actually the Greek word *θεραπεύω*, from which we get our word *therapy*, the treatment of injury or disease. But the word had a more general sense: *serve, care for, wait upon*, as well as the specialized sense *treat* (medically). But whether translated “*worshiped* with men’s hands” or “*served* with men’s hands,” the basic meaning is the same: the true God does not live in humanly-constructed buildings but in his body, the church; neither is he worshiped or served with human hands, as though he stood in need of anything. Here, the apostle Paul expresses a profound theological truth that every human being ought to ponder: God is all-sufficient in himself and doesn’t need anything from the creation. We’ll have more to say about this in a moment.

But first remember: the Bible is a book about *God*. This ought to be self-evident, but sometimes we forget this and read the Bible with the focus *what’s in*

this for me? But no! The Bible is a book about *God*; it is his self-disclosure—his love letter—to his covenant people. *God*—particularly God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—is the Bible’s main character. Our text today teaches us about the self-sufficiency of God.

The problem in Athens, as we have seen, was its pervasive idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of anything or anyone other than the true God—the God of Scripture, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Calvin famously observed that the human heart is a factory of idols. How prone we are to elevate something else beside the true God to the place of supreme importance in our lives! But if anything or anyone other than the God of Scripture has first place in our lives, that is *idolatry*, a violation of the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” If *anything*—another person, an electronic device, work, a hobby, money, success, family, leisure, privacy, an intoxicating substance, gambling, sports—becomes more important to us than the God who sent his Son to save us, then we are idolaters, and we need to repent. If any of these things that are good in and of themselves keep us from gathering with his people to worship the God of heaven, then we are idolaters and need to repent. Our Lord put it plainly: “If anyone comes to Me and does not *hate* his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” Our love for God must be so strong that any other love seems to be hatred by comparison.

Regarding the true God Paul says, “Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands.” In what sense is God worshiped with men’s hands? Why this emphasis on hands? Consider: priestly work was manual labor! Under the Old Covenant the priests slew animals and offered up food and drink offerings. This work was physical: the offerings were slain and offered up with the *hands*: slaughtering animals, lifting heavy carcasses (e.g. oxen, bulls), skinning them, hacking them up into parts, offering them up on the altar. No doubt due at least in part to the need to be at the peak of their physical strength, humanly speaking, the term of service for a priest was from age thirty to fifty.¹ After that time they retired from active service and acted as mentors to the younger priests, relieved of responsibility for the heavy day-to-day labor.

But not only was it priests who worshiped with their hands, lay people did as well. Penitent sinners brought their animal sacrifices, laid their hands on them and confessed their sins. The laying of their hands on the head of an animal was a symbolical transfer of the guilt of their sins to a sacrificial animal—substitutionary atonement. Penitent sinners laid their hands on an animal about to be slaughtered and confessed their guilt and the guilt of their households. Ceremonial washings,

¹ Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47

the ordination of priests and kings, and anointing with oil were all done by human hands.

But beyond that, the lifting up of the hands was a common posture of prayer. Consider these examples: **Psalm 28:2**, “Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I *lift up my hands* toward thy holy oracle [the holy of holies].” **Psalm 63:4**, “Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will *lift up my hands* in thy name.” **Psalm 141:2**, “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and *the lifting up of my hands* as the evening sacrifice.” **Lamentations 3:41**, “Let us lift up our heart *with our hands* unto God in the heavens.” **1 Timothy 2:8**, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, *lifting up holy hands*, without wrath and doubting.” Traditionally, the benediction at the end of the worship service is pronounced with the lifting up of the minister’s hands, symbolizing God’s blessing upon his people. Surely the pure, spiritual worship of God carried out according to the appointment of his holy Word involves the use of human hands.

But Paul’s point is that God is *not* worshiped by men’s hands. What does he mean? The statement is qualified by the context: God is not “worshiped with men’s hands, *as though He needed anything*, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” The God of Scripture does not need or require anything from man. Here is the God who existed from eternity past. In eternity there was only God; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed in perfect communion and felicity. In the book of Proverbs God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the wisdom of God speaks poetically (Prov. 8:22ff.; you may want to turn to it): “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primal dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him” Here, the preincarnate Christ testifies that the LORD—that is, God the Father—“possessed [him] from everlasting,”² “from the beginning,³ before there was ever an earth”—in other words, in eternity past. Gill comments: “He was then, and from all eternity, ‘by him,’ or ‘with him’; which denotes his co-existence with God, and his relation to him as his Father; his nearness to him, his equality with him, and his distinction from him.” Look

² עולם

³ ראש

especially at verse 30, where the Son testifies, “I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in eternity past, before the incarnation of the Son, lived in perfect fellowship, happiness and bliss—never a cross word, never a disagreement, lacking nothing. This was before time began, before the creation of the angels, before the creation of the physical universe. There was only pure spirit, yet God needed nothing. Truly, as our Confession puts it, the God of heaven is “all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.” God is in need of nothing. He doesn’t receive anything from man that man has not first received from him. Man is told to bless God (“Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!”)—but he has blessed us first! When we bless God we are simply returning to him the blessing he has first given us. God is altogether glorious. Man cannot add to his glory. How do you choose a gift for a person who has everything? No matter what you want to get him, he already has one of those! God is like that, though he is in no way a materialist. He is all-sufficient in and of himself. He lacks nothing; as a matter of fact, he is the Creator of things—of everything. In the book of Romans Paul asks, “Who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:35–36). Plainly, a person cannot give anything to God that he has not first received from the hand of God. God is indebted to, and obligated to, no one. Even faith itself is a gift of God: God gives the gift of faith, enabling us to believe. We can’t take credit for our faith; we can’t take credit for any gifts that we have; they have all been endowed by our beneficent Creator, who gave them to us for his glory. Whatever gifts we have, we are duty-bound to use them for his glory, not squander them on our lusts.

God does not gain anything by man’s worship. As I said a few moments ago, God is all-sufficient in himself and doesn’t need anything from the creation. Our Acts text is the proof text for Westminster Confession of Faith 2.2, which teaches that God is “all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.” As Gill put it, “... men by worshiping God do not give anything to him, that can be of any use or service to him; he, being God all-sufficient, stands in need of nothing ... Nothing is given to God, as adding any thing to his essential glory and happiness.” God does not *require* anything from us.

This truth was evident to Eliphaz the Temanite, who came to comfort Job. He said, “Can a man be profitable to God, though he who is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?” When, by his grace, we are brought to faith in Christ the Son, the only Mediator, the only one who can wash away our

sins by his own precious blood and bring us into fellowship with God, it does not bring profit or gain to God. God is in need of nothing! But consider point two,

2. God desires our worship.

Amazingly, though God is not “worshiped with men’s hands, *as though He needed anything*”—as though man the creature could add anything to the all-sufficient Creator—the fact remains that God is indeed “worshiped with men’s hands”! Jesus taught that “the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23). The Father is seeking worshipers. We are to worship in spirit and truth, but our worship is not out-of-body. God made us man to worship him as man. When Christ returns we will be given new, glorified bodies in which to worship the resurrected and ascended Christ for eternity.

Though in eternity the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—existed in perfect fellowship and unity, and was in need of nothing, God determined to create man, and choose a people for himself—people to be his worshipers. Jesus spoke of this in his high-priestly prayer. He said, “I have manifested Your name to *the men whom You have given Me out of the world*. They were Yours, *You gave them to Me*, and they have kept Your word. . . . I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for *those whom You have given Me*, for they are Yours. . . . *Those whom You gave Me* I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:6–12). Notice our Lord’s repeated reference to his people as “the men whom You have given Me out of the world,” “You gave them to Me,” “those whom You have given Me,” “those whom You gave Me.” Here was a people given to Christ. He loved them with an everlasting love. He undertook the mission of coming to this sinful earth to die in their place, to redeem them unto God, to gather them into his church, and to pour out upon them his Holy Spirit to work in their hearts and sanctify them and prepare them for heaven, where they would enjoy unbroken fellowship with him and sing his praises forever.

Such worship would not in any way add to the intrinsic glory of the Creator and Redeemer, who is infinitely glorious in and of himself, but “it *pleased* God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). How amazing, that the eternal God would be “pleased” to save any of the fallen sons of Adam! If you belong to Christ, then you can know he was “pleased” to save you—and save you for the express purpose of having fellowship with God. The apostle John expressed it this way: “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). That fellowship with the Father and his Son is the source of the Christian’s joy. It is fellowship that will continue throughout this life and into eternity in heaven. It is a fellowship that makes even suffering for the faith worthwhile.

The Voice of the Martyrs tells the story of Pastor Emmanuel Maigairi, who lives in Nigeria's Kaduna state. The pastor had just finished praying with his wife and mother-in-law on the evening of February 27, 2021, when three dozen Fulani Islamic militants burst into the house. The militants ripped the curtains from the windows and used them to bind and blindfold the pastor, his wife and mother-in-law. The gang's leader told the pastor, "If we like, we might kill you." The pastor was unfazed: "I have given myself over to God," he said boldly, "and I am ready to die." The attackers took the family's phones and a box of money belonging to Pastor Maigairi's church, then led their captives into the forest. As they marched, the pastor's mother-in-law was slowing their progress, so one of their captors hit her on the head with the butt of his gun and another cut her on the back of her neck with a machete, leaving her for dead. About an hour and a half later, the militants decided that the pastor's wife was expendable. They discussed killing her, but eventually released her and told her how to find her way home. Her mother, who had been left behind earlier, survived the ordeal.

After walking for hours, Pastor Maigairi arrived at the militants' camp, where he began the most difficult month of his life. During the day he was bound, blindfolded and guarded by armed guards. At night, he and other prisoners slept on the ground, where maggots crawled around their hands and feet. The prisoners used empty soda bottles as pillows so the worms would not be able to enter their ears. Pastor Maigairi was beaten frequently—sometimes so severely that other prisoners feared he had been killed. His captors broke ribs, one of his fingers, and cut him with a machete on his lower back. On Sundays they beat him just because he was a pastor. His captors demanded money from his family, threatening to kill him if they wouldn't pay. After a month and a day in captivity, he was finally released and returned to his family. Though he sometimes struggles with fear, he continues to serve as a pastor.

But the God whom we serve is sovereign. Paul goes on to say that "He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." Sometimes we wonder why God does things the way he does. Why does he bring one unworthy sinner to himself and pass over another? By nature we are all equally unworthy; all of us deserve to perish in our rebellion, but he has mercy upon some. Clearly, the duty of us all is to "seek the Lord." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6–7).

Does God *require* anything from us, as though he stands in need of anything?
No, but he *desires* our voluntary worship!

Are you by God's grace a lover of Christ? Do you desire to worship and serve him throughout all your days? If so, thank him for his regenerating grace. Amen.