

# The Sufficient God, Acts 17:16-33

What is God Really Like? #15

◆**Intro:** NT Wright observes that Maria Shriver, married to “Ahh-nold” Schwazenegger, niece to JFK has written a book! It’s called “What’s Heaven?” It’s for kids, and has lots of pictures of fluffy clouds and blue skies, with one sentence on each page. Heaven, she says,

◆“is somewhere you believe in...It’s a beautiful place where you can sit on soft clouds and talk to other people who are there. At night you can sit next to the stars, which are the brightest of anywhere in the universe...If you’re good throughout your life, then you get to go to heaven..When your life is finished here on earth, God sends angels down to take you up to Heaven to be with him... [And Grandma is] alive in me... Most important, she taught me to believe in myself...She’s in a safe place, with the stars, with God, and the angels...She is watching over us from up there....”

◆This is more or less what millions of Westerners have come to believe. What Shriver writes is a mixture of world philosophies, but the truth the Bible teaches is very different on many levels. There are a host of thoughts about what life is about, and what happens when you die. There have been for as long as there have been people. Philosophers have long said that how you make sense of death, and life beyond it, is the key to how you think seriously about everything else! Christians agree. For example, if you don’t particularly relish the idea of floating on clouds for eternity as Shriver suggests, you may not want to go to heaven. And if you don’t want to go to that kind of heaven, you may not worry then much about being good down here, if that’s all it gets you. You see? Your worldview has everything to do with how you live now. If you believe that what we see

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here is all there is, then why care about what we do now? What difference does it make except for in the fleeting moment? Maximize the tingles and the fun, for tomorrow we may be gone! Do what feels good before your dead and can't feel anything anyway. As Christians, we agree with this. Look.

◆ *“If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”” 1 Corinthians 15:32, NIV.*

◆ What happens in our text is that Paul preaches the whole of the Christian worldview. It is the Easter worldview. It is the biblical philosophy of life and death, history and the future, where we came from and where we're going and what matters now. We'll come back to that in a minute. Let me summarize:

◆ 1) Everyone is looking for God. (That's what our idols are all about.)

In fact God made you for this! To look for him.

◆ “God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” Acts 17:27, NIV.

◆ 2) There is one; the sufficient Creator. It's not Zeus. It's not Buddha. It's not any of the millions that Hindus worship.

◆ ““The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.” Acts 17:24, NIV.

◆ 3) We all came from one man, Adam so the answer for any man in the same for every man. Chinese and Scottish, black and white, killers, lovers, insane and intellectuals. Hence, the Biblical account is the true account. (Not very politically tolerant of Paul in a city covered with idols to innumerable gods.)

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◆“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” Acts 17:26, NIV.

◆4) Our lives will all answer to the One True God, Jesus, in the end.

◆“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

◆5) Easter is the proof of this.

◆He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:31, NIV.

◆6) So stop chasing all the other things for your sense of worth, joy, purpose. Repent and return to God your Father!

◆““Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:29, 30, NIV.

◆**2.** Today is the last in a series that we began in January looking at what God is really like. The banners all over the walls up here are reminders of where we’ve been and what he’s like. (If you are curious about one or another, you can find both the audio and the text on our website.) Today we will consider the attribute of God called his “sufficiency.” **What does it mean that God is sufficient?** It comes out clearly in Paul’s sermon in Athens.

◆““The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:24, 25, NIV.

◆ It means that God is not dependent on anyone or anything. It means that he is complete in himself, that He is the one and only absolute power apart

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from all else. (It's why we call him God, after all.) Nothing in created reality is self-sufficient. Science reminds us of this. All things are contingent on other things for survival. But God is not. He is sufficient in himself, and he is sufficient for us!

◆ God's sufficiency means he is the sole source of everything else, not a recipient. Jesus said, "as the father has life in himself, so the son has life in himself. (And this is the Easter message, people. Jesus has life in himself!)

◆ "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." Acts 17:26, NIV.

◆ Contrary to the Greek views of the gods, who need the prayers, adulations, and sacrifices of men, the true God does not. On the flip side, we need him!

◆ *"I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank-offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me."* Psalms 50:9-15, NIV.

◆ God is the only being who is totally free and independent. It is not an option for any of us. We are by contrast completely dependent and under his authority, and the laws of created reality, at all moments. It does not matter if you believe in him or not. Your opinion does not change reality.

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Tozer put it, “Were every man on earth an atheist, it could not affect God in any way. He is what he is in himself... To believe in him adds nothing to his perfection; to doubt him takes nothing away.”

◆B. God’s sufficiency means God does not become, or learn. He does not discover. He is not corrected. We do not enhance him or detract from him. He is completely happy. As J I Packer put it, “God was happy without man before man was made; He would have continued to be happy had he simply destroyed man after man has sinned.” So God is not like other gods.

◆When my father served with the Marines in Vietnam he observed people praying before their idols. He told me they would smear honey on the lips of the idols to make their reports in the spirit realm sweet. If you’ve ever been to an asian country you know that many of their shrines and statues are often laden with flowers, fruits, grains, dishes –all to make the god’s happy. Not so with the true God. He is not an angry God that we must calm down. He is not a fidgeting God that we must occupy. Our giving to him is not to change him. It is to change us! To teach us his holiness. God is not the beneficiary here today because we have come to this place of worship. We are. He would not be any worse off if we had stayed home today. We would be, but not him.

◆*Job 35:7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand? 8 Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself, and your righteousness only the sons of men.*

◆**2. So what does God’s attribute of sufficiency mean for us?** In a nutshell? It means the God of the Bible is everything you could ever need

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or want. And you are invited to accept this on faith that he is telling the truth. Let examine it in more detail.

◆A. It means his love for you is completely voluntary and therefore genuine. You see, God did not have to make every nation of men. He was under no obligation to let you exist. And yet he did. Furthermore, he is under no obligation to let you find him, or to forgive your sinning, or to give you new life, eternal life. If anyone lives beyond the grave, it is because of his delight and have nothing to do with their forcing it through by good behavior. His love is a good fathers voluntary love.

◆Patrick Morley in *Man in the Mirror*, tells of an ill-fated fishing trip on which a group of men landed by seaplane in a secluded bay in Alaska. It was a great day of fishing but when they returned to their plane it was aground because of the fluctuating tides. They had no option but to wait for the next morning. When they did take off they only made it a few feet off the water because one of the pontoons had been punctured when aground and had filled with sea water. As their plane was sinking the three men and a twelve year-old son, Mark prayed and jumped into the icy cold water to swim to shore. The rip tide was strong and two of the men reached the shore exhausted. Looking back they saw their companion, also a strong swimmer was not swimming to shore. His twelve-year-old son was not strong enough to make it. They saw the father with his arms around his son being swept out to sea. He chose to die with his son rather than live without him. That my friends is like unto the love of God for us. That is the love that sent Christ to the cross on Good

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Friday, and that is the love that raised Christ back to greater human life on Easter Sunday morning. It was a voluntary redemption, don't ever forget it.

◆ That brings us back to the Jesus of Easter. What formed the Christian religion was Jesus' death & resurrection. A real man died, but came back to real man life, and left real footprints in the real sand *after* he had been really put in the real ground to decompose. Now this was not an episode of the Walking Dead. Jesus resurrected body was NOT half decomposed. He did not drag one foot as he walked, nor did he moan. His real, raised human body was even more than what any of us have ever had. It was a "first". He looked like who he was before. He could eat fish and it didn't fall through a ghost body to the ground like in Captain Barbosa in Pirates of the Caribbean. On the other hand, he didn't need doors, and he could appear from nowhere. The Bible says this is what we have coming too if we belong to Jesus. That's what it means when it say he is the "first fruits". The beginning of the harvest.

◆ Everyone knows, and everyone in the Roman Empire, and the Israeli nation in the first century knew that people don't come back to life after they are really dead. No religions taught that such a thing could or would happen except the Jews but they didn't think it would ever happen in history. Only at the *end* of human history. But then there was the empty grave, and no body of Jesus. The Roman government couldn't produce it to quell the new religion of Christ-followers, or they would have. You don't make the Roman military machine look bad and get away with it. The Jews couldn't produce the body either. They would have loved to. Still, there was

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a Jesus that got crucified. No one could dispute that he had created quite a stir in history.

◆B. It means none of our idols will ever be enough to satisfy any of us in the end. You say, “Oh, I don’t have any idols.” Sure you do. Your idols are whatever to turn to for help and hope in life and death. In this we have not progressed beyond Athens of the First Century!

◆v16 “While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” Acts 17:16, NIV. ( the greek term “full” means submerged. One ancient historian said it was easier to find an idol in Athens than a man. )

◆v22 “Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.” Acts 17:22, NIV. (Everyone is religious, it’s just what you are religious about that differs. )

◆We just don’t build statues and altars to our idols, that’s all. Some people idolize the human body. Tucking it in, or filling it out, or sculpting it, or paging through thousands of pictures of it wistfully, or touching it, or playing with, or cross-dressing it, or stripping it. A recent hit song by Ed Sheeran makes the point. He sings...

I'm in love with the shape of you  
We push and pull like a magnet do  
Although my heart is falling too  
I'm in love with your body  
Oh—I—oh—I—oh—I—oh—I  
I'm in love with your body  
Every day discovering something brand new  
I'm in love with the shape of you

◆At least we used to pretend it was love we were singing about. Now we just say it right out there. It’s the body. It’s the sex we are looking for.

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◆ There is really no end to our idols:

◆ Money: yachts, helicopters, lake homes, Florida condos, world travel

◆ Power: being able to boss people around. Political recognition. Rank. Ownership that gives privilege. Club membership.

◆ Substances we abuse: alcohol (gin, whisky, scotch, rum, tequilla, vodka, and lets not get started on wine. (I have a relative who takes his own wine glass in a mahogany case to the restaurant.)

◆ The Look: fashion, make-up, new hair designs, color, how you dress can be an idol that makes you feel anything from acceptance in your looseness, to pride in your conservatism.

◆ Social media: how many likes did that post get? How many friends saw my picture? what is Jodi's cousin having for a snack? hashtag-searching for significance.

◆ Entertainment: You phone. Your tablet. Your laptop. Your desktop. playing on the web, fantasy gaming, reading or viewing every astonishing story advertised, news. Your favorite talk radio. being captured by endless episodes of a TV show on netflix. (Nah, I can't play cards tonight, I'm gonna watch season 2! )

◆ Any of these things might be your idol. It can be mental, or material.

What do you go to to feel better, to forget, to get past, to take care of hurt or sorrow? What consumes most of your free time and energy. That will be where you idol is. The problem with idols is they are always false gods that don't deliver.

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◆1) So God's sufficiency means the Epicureans that Paul was reasoning with in Athens were wrong! Epicureans, started by Epicureus (b.341BC) believed that pleasure was the highest form of life. Freedom from pain and fear, tranquility. Get while the getting is good because once you kick the bucket its over -no immortality of soul, much less body! (This philosophy of life is alive and well in our world.)

◆2) God's sufficiency means the Stoic philosophers were also wrong. Founded by Zeno, also a resident of Athen, the Stoic school was somewhat fatalistic teaching that you must endure you place, your duty, your station in life, you pain. No options. Just be proud and tough and survive. The Christian worldview says that's not true either. There is a human life that is better than the fallen one you and I know. Because of Jesus resurrection, our resurrection is possible.

◆*“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:17-20, NIV.*

◆**Conclusion:** What Paul hoped to convince the Athenian people, and what I hope to convince you here today is simply this: God is sufficient in himself. And therefore he is sufficient for us as well. Everything we are chasing and not finding can be found in turning our lives over to him. GK Chesterton wrote that no man has ever knocked on the door of a brothel

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who was not looking for God. Put in today's terms, no one has ever surfed the internet who was not looking for God. Augustine said that inside every man is a God's-shaped vacuum. Pascal said our hearts are restless until we rest in God. Jesus said, come to me and I will give you rest. Walk with me and learn from me and you will find rest for your soul. Resurrection is your proof.

◆“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” Acts 3:19-21, NIV.