

"The Independence of God"
(Acts 17:24-25)

Introduction: We are dependent creatures who are in need of many things. We need our daily supply of food to sustain us, clothing to protect us from extreme temperatures, shelter to protect us from the elements, government to protect us from anarchy, friends to protect us from loneliness, to name but a few. Most of all, of course, we need God's mercy and grace to protect us from sin and its consequences.

But God is never in need of anything. He has all that He requires in Himself. He existed eternally without His creatures and He could go on doing so. And even after He created, He did not therefore become dependent upon His creation. No, God is still sufficient in and of Himself. And this is what the Spirit of God is saying in this passage this evening. That is,

God stands in need of nothing from His creation, rather He Himself is the One who supplies all of His creature's needs.

I. God Does Not Need Anything From His Creatures.

A. God is the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

1. Paul is countering false religious thought.
 - a. Paul had walked through their pantheon of gods.
 - b. His spirit was provoked because of their idolatry. They worshiped all the gods that they have heard of.
 - c. He uses their religiosity as a point of departure.
 - d. Then he draws their attention to the **unknown god**. The one that they did not know.
 - e. What they worship in ignorance, he now declares.
 - f. Again we see the theme, as we did last week, that when men seek to worship in ignorance, they don't worship at all.
 - (i) Man must know the true object of worship.
 - (ii) He must know how this object desires to be worshiped.
 - (iii) Lest his worship end in no worship at all.
 - g. The Athenians were followers of the Homer's work **The Iliad** and **The Odessey**.
 - (i) Polytheistic.
 - (ii) The philosophers submitted to the common superstition of the people.
2. Paul gives them true knowledge of the one true God.
 - a. Paul destroys their polytheism.
 - b. God is the One who created the world and all things in it.
 - (i) Contra Aristotle's eternal matter.
 - (ii) Contra Epicurus' atomic shift.
 - (iii) It is not eternal matter, but eternal mind.
 - c. God therefore is the sovereign ruler, the Lord of His creation.

- (i) He created the world as it were as a vassal.
- (ii) He is the Sovereign, His creation is His servant.
- (iii) And He can sovereignly use His creatures as He sees fit.

B. Because He Made All Things He Does Not Need Anything From His Creatures.

1. He does not need them to build Him a dwelling place.
 - a. The Athenians built temples to house their gods.
 - (i) They were places of worship.
 - (ii) They placed there the idols they made.
 - (iii) The idols were gods of their own imaginations.
 - b. But the true God does not dwell in temples made with hands.
 - (i) In the OT, He manifested His presence in the Tabernacle/Temple.
 - (ii) Yet even Solomon recognized that the whole universe could not contain Him <I Kings 8:27>.
 - (iii) And in the NT the same truth is revealed <Acts 7:44-50>.
 - (iv) It is not the OT doctrine being attacked, but the heathenistic conception.
 - c. But God does dwell in temples not made by hands.
 - (i) God dwells in His people.
 - (ii) He did in the O & NT graciously.
 - (iii) And He does so today.
 - (iv) However, His survival does not depend upon such indwelling.
2. And He does not need the service of any creature.
 - a. The word can mean worship or service in general.
 - b. God does not need the worship of His creatures.
 - (i) The pagans had elaborate ceremonies to worship their deities.
 - (a) They believed the ceremony pleased them.
 - (b) They would sacrifice material goods to feed them.
 - (c) The philosophers didn't believe this, but the common man did.
 - (ii) The worship of the Jews as well was often reduced to the outward aspects only.
 - (a) They thought that the ceremonies were sufficient to please God.
 - (b) Rather the outward symbols and emblems were to strengthen their faith.
 - (c) They were means by which the Lord was lifting their hearts heavenward.
 - (d) Ceremony, in and of itself, was never sufficient.
 - c. There is nothing that man need do to sustain God.
 - (i) There is no service we perform that He needs.
 - (ii) God has all He needs in Himself.

(iii) God has all perfection in Himself, and anything good we have comes from Him.

3. This is God's independence: God is in need of nothing from His creation.
 - a. Unlike His creation, God is self-existent.
 - (i) Everything that exists has a cause.
 - (ii) But God is the uncaused cause, the first-cause.
 - (iii) We do not look behind God to see what caused Him to be.
 - (iv) The ground of His existence is found in Himself.
 - (v) He is that which exists necessarily.
 - (a) He exists from all eternity.
 - (b) He is before all things.
 - (c) There is therefore nothing upon which He could depend.
 - b. And God did not create because He needed the creation to complete Himself. Rather, He created out of His fullness.
 - (i) Man was not created to complete the blessedness of God.
 - (a) He is perfectly blessed in Himself.
 - (b) He stands in need of nothing.
 - (ii) But it is from His outgoing love that He brings creatures to participate in His fullness (Gerstner 16).
 - (a) The creation was God's desire to share His overabundance.
 - (b) To permit creatures to enter His super-sufficiency [Gerstner 16].
 - (c) God did not even need to share His abundance.
 - (d) But it pleased Him to do *so*.

II. God Is Independent, But Man, By Contrast, Is Dependent.

A. God Gives Them Their Very Life and Breath.

1. Paul points out that far from God needing our worship and service to sustain Him, He sustains them.
2. God is Spirit and the source of all life.
 - a. We saw this last week [John 4:24].
 - b. God is the source of all things.
 - c. He is the infinite Spirit who is the source of all life.
3. He gives to all men life and breath.
 - a. He gives to the lifeless matter of the human body, the breath of life.
 - b. Apart from that spiritual force, the body would quickly turn into lifeless dust.
 - c. Man depends upon God for every breath that he draws.
 - d. He even gives the air to breathe.

B. He Not Only Gives Them Life and Breath, But All Things.

1. God created all things that are.
2. God therefore is the sole owner and sovereign over all

His possessions.

- a. The One who made all things possesses all things.
- b. Since He possesses all things He made, there is nothing we could give to Him He does not already own.

3. Far from needing anything, He is the One who allots to each his portion.

- a. He is the benevolent One who gives His possessions to all men to enjoy.
- b. To some He gives much, to others little.
- c. But everything that man has is a gift from God.
- d. And man depends upon God for his every need.

4. *So Paul corrects the false concepts of the Athenians by declaring that God does not depend on anything from man, but man depends on God for everything.*

III. *But This is Not to Say that He Does Not Require or Receive Anything From Man (Applicational).*

A. *God Requires All to Worship and Obey Him.*

1. There is nothing that you or I can possibly do to meet any of His needs, for He hasn't any.

2. But He does **require** that you worship Him for who He is and for what He has done.

- a. He commands that you worship Him.
 - (i) God is a perfect Being, and as such, it is fitting that He be worshiped.
 - (ii) It is not conceit on God's part to command our worship. **It is a crime if we do not!**
 - (iii) And it is the utmost wickedness to refuse God what is rightfully His.

b. And He commands that you give thanks for His benevolence and grace.

- (i) All men receive good from His hand.
- (ii) But not all give thanks to Him.
- (iii) Wicked men thank themselves for their strength and shrewdness for what they have.
- (iv) They reject the notion that they are the recipients of God's beneficence.
- (v) But you know that God has given you all things that you have to enjoy.
- (vi) And you are aware of the fact that apart from His saving grace you would be forever lost.
- (vii) And so you know that no amount of thanksgiving would ever even the score.
- (viii) When you give praise and adoration to Him you are giving God what is rightfully His.
- (ix) And it is right and fitting that you do.
- (x) Otherwise it is a sign of abject ingratitude.

3. And He does **command** that you obey His laws.

- a. He recreated you in His image.
 - (i) He created you the highest order of His creation.
 - (ii) Higher even than the angels.

- (iii) You bear God's image in that you are rational, volitional, and moral beings.
 - (iv) That moral image was lost in the Fall, but restored in Christ.
- b. Now, He commands you to reflect His image.
 - (i) Because you are made after His likeness, He requires that you glorify Him by reflecting His image.
 - (ii) When you can reflect God's image in your new nature by a life of holiness, the rest of His image will be reflected as well.
 - (iii) His moral perfection is reflected in His Law, and when you keep it, you reflect that image as well.
 - (iv) The unregenerate are commanded to as well, though they cannot because of their sin.
 - c. To not do so is an affront to His holiness.
- B. And He Graciously Receives Your Worship and Obedience.*
- 1. Your worship and obedience are both unacceptable.
 - a. Your most heartfelt thanks are unacceptable.
 - b. Your most affectionate praise is unworthy of His name.
 - c. Your most sincere prayer cannot in itself move God.
 - d. Because the best of all you do is still polluted with sin.
 - e. And even to miss the mark by a little is to fall infinitely short of His glory.
 - 2. But He also gives gracious mediation by which it is made acceptable.
 - a. Here is God's love.
 - b. Here is the motivation for all He commands you.
 - c. No, you are not acceptable to God in yourself at any time.
 - d. No, even with a heart cleansed from sin, you cannot generate sufficient love for Him.
 - e. But He gives His Son to you to mediate, to make what you do acceptable to Him.
 - f. God receives your thanksgiving, praise, worship, and obedience for the sake of His Beloved Son.
 - g. You are made acceptable in Christ.
- C. But Not Because He Needs It But In Order to Bring Blessing to You His Servants.*
- 1. God does not need anything.
 - a. He has all He desires.
 - b. His blessedness could not be increased or diminished by one iota by anything that you do.
 - 2. But He delights to bless His children.
 - a. It was out of His over-abundance that God made you.
 - b. He did so because it was pleasing to Him to share His love with you.

3. And He knows that in worshiping Him, you will be fully blessed and fulfilled in that you will be doing that for which the whole creation was made: *to glorify the One who is worthy to receive all honor, glory, might, power, and dominion, forever and ever. Amen.*