

Acts 17:23b-25

God is Self-Existent

Open your Bible to...

Acts 17:23b Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

Acts 17:24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Acts 17:25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Pray

Intro

✓ Self-existent ~ let me begin with an illustration

It was either 1975 or 76 that I was out on a training ride with some of the guys from my cycling team.

We were scheduled to ride 75-miles.

A round trip beginning in Santa Barbara, then winding our way south through Carpinteria, over Casitas Pass to Ojai, west to Ventura, and back to Santa Barbara via Hwy. 101.

I was only 17 or 18 at the time, 5'11", and not more than 130lbs even though I was consuming 8,500 calories a day!

While I was never fast enough to be a sprinter when the road turned upward I was in my element...

...I could make all those other riders hurt with my uphill speed!

So when our group started up Casitas Pass my friends waved me goodbye because they knew I was going to fly up that mountain.

In cycling parlance a great climber is said to “*dance on the pedals*.”

And dancing on the pedals I was!

Up and up I danced until I reached Ojai where I waited for my earthbound friends.

All was well as we headed down the mountain toward the coast but when we turned north we got slammed by a fierce headwind as we made our way back to Santa Barbara.

Sports nutrition was in its infancy back then, Gatorade and power bars didn’t exist, so we survived on fig bars, bananas, and peanut butter on crackers.

Well I had neglected to bring anything other than water with me—not very bright!

We got as far Carpentaria and then I “bonked.”

My blood sugar was so low that I just stopped peddling!

My friends actually had to push me until we could find a store where I could replenish the fuel I had expended in that uphill ride—can’t remember if it was orange juice or chocolate milk but I was in desperate need of sustenance!

The point is that I couldn’t ride that distance sustained by the little glycogen stored in my body...

...I needed sustenance—a fuel source from outside my body to keep me going—fluid, carbohydrates, etc.

The same is true for everyone and everything in the universe...

...everyone and everything, needs something outside of itself to continue to exist—no such thing as perpetual motion anything in Creation!

Everything that is except for God, Who alone is self-existent!

God is Self-Existent

✓ Self-existent

As we read in our opening text the apostle Paul tells us that because God created us and everything in the universe, He doesn't need us or anything from us.

That is, He is Self-Existent.

Think about that for a moment...

You and I and every living thing needs something outside of our ourselves to continue to exist.

We need to intake food, water, oxygen, and light, to sustain our physical vitality.

We need human relationships, and love to sustain our mental health, and to continue the human race by reproduction.

We need to be born-again that we might become spiritually whole and reconciled with God that we might exist eternally with Him.

Even non-living things like planets, stars, rubies, dirt, and atoms are not self-existent for without God's continual care they would cease to exist! As Paul observed in Colossians 1:15-17...

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in

*heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or
authorities—all things were created through him and
for him. And he is before all things, and in him all
things hold together.”*

Jesus is literally, presently, holding all of Creation together!

And with just a word He could make all of it cease to exist!

Which according to the Old Testament prophets, and Revelation 20 will happen one day when Christ judges the wicked at the Great White Throne Judgment!

So, it is self-evident that everyone and everything that God created...

...both in the material and the spiritual world need sustenance, something, or some force from outside of oneself or itself to continue existing.

✓ But God

God is different.

He doesn't breathe, so He doesn't need air.

He doesn't eat, so He doesn't need food.

He is pure spirit, so He doesn't need any material comfort or necessity.

He is One God, in Three Persons, so He doesn't need any relationship outside of Himself!

He exists for all of eternity in and of Himself, independent of anyone and anything!

Said another way, God is not dependent upon another for His existence...

...He is self-existent!

The fancy theological word that describes this attribute of God is aseity (a-sea-a-tee).

It comes to us from the Latin phrase *a se* (a-sea), which means “of oneself”, or “of Himself.”

God’s self-existence teaches us that God is independent of everything and everyone in Creation...

He is the Creator, not the creation.

He doesn’t need anything, but He gives all things!

As we just read in our opening text...

“since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”
Acts 17:25b

And in Romans 11:36, Paul tells us...

“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

So while God does not need anything to sustain His existence, He is the Sustainer of everything else in Creation!

God is Uncaused

✓ Uncaused

When we talk about God's self-existence we need to make an important distinction, and that is...

...that God is not self-caused.

That's because it is impossible to cause oneself to come into existence.

Logically one would have to already exist to cause anything to exist!

If you don't exist, then you cannot make anything exist, most especially yourself!

Nothing cannot make something!

So when we say that God is self-existent it include the idea that He has always existed, for He is eternal and therefore uncaused.

✓ God has no origin story

What do we mean when we say that God is uncaused?

We mean that He has no origin story! As Moses declares...

*"Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."*
Psalms 90:2

Ex. Contrast that with comic book heroes

Every comic book hero has an origin story, for example when Jerry Siegel created Superman he wrote an origin story to explain to his audience how Clark Kent became Superman.

Superman didn't always exist; he had an origin story; he had a beginning.

So too everything and everyone in Creation (material and spiritual) has an origin story...

...because we were all caused to exist by the uncaused God Who has always existed.

So God has no origin story because He has no beginning...

...He is uncaused.

Ap. Our relationship to God

Here's the point as it relates to God's aseity...

Since He caused everyone and everything to exist...

...He doesn't need anything from His Creation—including us because He is self-existent.

The take-home point...

...He doesn't need us, but we desperately need Him!

Then why did God create?

✓ Creation

That leads to an interesting question that you might already be wondering about, and that is...

“Since God doesn’t need anything or anyone, then why did He create angels, the universe and most importantly...

...why did He create people—more specifically why did He create me?”

First of all we must recognize that God did not create people because He was lonely or needed to create.

That’s because as we’ve already established He is and always has been complete, content and self-existent in and of Himself.

Okay, but that still doesn’t answer our question...

“Why then did He create people?”

Historically Church tradition, creeds and confessions have answered that question by saying something like...

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

Which is based in part on Revelation 4:11, which the KJV renders...

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

But we mustn't think that God is so insecure that He had to create His own fan club, people to worship Him and to bring Him glory.

Again, He doesn't need anything from us including giving Him glory!

So we're back to our question...

"Why then did He create mankind?"

The short answer...we really don't know why!

It's a bit of mystery that bible students and theologians have wrestled with for centuries without ever producing a really satisfactory answer.

The reality is that we probably won't fully understand why God made us until we're in Heaven with Him.

Perhaps then the best answer that we can offer is the following...

While God doesn't need us, He wants us.

And that is an awesome thought, which we'll develop in the next section.

So while I can't send you home with a tidy answer to the question of why God, Who doesn't need anything or anyone, created us or for that matter anything...

...we can be excited about the many blessings and benefits that we experience because God is self-existent.

The blessings & benefits of God's aseity

- ✓ The blessings and benefits of God's aseity

At this point you may be thinking...

"I see your point, and that's all very interesting and academic, but how in the world does the fact that God is self-existent affect me?"

Great question! We'll there are probably dozens of blessings and benefits that belong to us because of God's aseity but lets just focus on three that we can ruminate on over the next week. Those are...

- Our salvation
- Our service
- Our stuff

Please appreciate how I alliterated those points to all start with an "S"!

- 1) Our salvation

God's aseity shines brightest when set against all other relationships that we have in life.

That is, in every other relationship in life, whether it is with your spouse, employer, or coach, each person has a need that is met or fulfilled by the other.

Some transaction takes place in which both people get something out of the relationship.

For example, you work, and you get paid for that work. The person you work for gets something done and you get money.

But God's aseity tells us that God doesn't need anything from us, nor do we have anything that He lacks.

So our relationship with God is not based on a value for value exchange because God doesn't gain any benefit from us.

We get all of the benefit from a relationship with God, and He gains nothing that He needs...

...for He needs nothing!

Ex. Salvation

So when it comes to the transaction by which you and I are saved God gives us salvation as a free gift!

We can't buy it.

We can't work for it.

There's nothing we can trade for it.

That's one aspect of God's aseity!

Because God has no needs He isn't lacking anything.

So when He offers us salvation it's a gift with no strings attached!

Why? Because He is lacking nothing...

...He is able to give us salvation freely!

Paul reveals this truth in Romans 6:23 where he tells us...

*“For the wages of sin is death, but
the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our
Lord.”*

Did you catch how Paul described God’s aseity...

The wages of sin is death, that is, by our works of unrighteousness we earn death—a value for value transaction!

But the gift of God is eternal life—something God gives without needing anything in return from us!

It’s one of Paul’s favorite themes that he writes about in many of his letters, for example you all know Ephesians 2:8-9...

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not
of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

So, far from being a cold academic truth God’s aseity reminds us that our salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life with God, and access now to all of Heaven’s riches...

...is a free gift from the One Who needs nothing, but freely gives to all who will receive His Son as Savior and Lord!

Ap. Coming to Jesus for salvation

You don’t have to get your life together first before accepting His gift of salvation...

...just come as you are!

2) Our service

Since God doesn't need our help to accomplish His purpose and plans because He well able to do all that He desires to be done...

...it follows that He doesn't need our service!

Afterall, with just a word He spoke everything into existence!

Obviously then He doesn't need our help to accomplish His will today.

So God's aseity sets us free to serve with a pure motivation, rather than out of guilt or a sense of necessity.

What motivation?

The motivation of love!

Love for God who doesn't need us, our love, or our service, but Who freely gave us all things in Christ.

Love that we can express in our service to others as a testimony of the love that we have freely received from God!

Martin Luther captured this idea saying...

*"God does not need our good works,
but our neighbor does."*

Furthermore, God's aseity—His self-existence provides us with an example of how we are to serve others.

Just as God expressed His love for us through the giving of His Son...

...a free gift without any strings attached, and without any demand that we reciprocate that love.

So too we can and should love others without expecting anything in return...

...a free gift of our service without any strings attached, and without any expectation that those we serve will love or serve us back.

As we do so our service provides the world with a living picture of the Gospel of Christ!

Francis of Assisi put it this way...

“Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.”

That is, our lives should be a living demonstration of God’s self-existence...

...freely giving of our self to serve others just as Jesus freely gave Himself to serve us.

Remember that Jesus said in Matthew 20:28...

“...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

So through our service to others we can demonstrate the beauty of the Gospel in a way that captures the attention of the lost...

...to consider the free gift of salvation provided by the God who doesn’t need anything, but Who freely gave everything!

3) Our stuff

The Scripture makes it abundantly clear that there is nothing inherently lovable, or desirable about sinful man that would arouse God's love for you and me.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:8...

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Once again we're reminded by the truth of God's aseity that His love for us is not motivated by a desire to get something we have, or even because we are inherently loveable...

Rather His love for us arises out of His own nature...

...a God Who is able to extend His love free of the need to receive anything we have and anything we are in return!

Let me illustrate it this way.

Ex. Alice Walton ~ heir to Sam Walton founder of Wal-Mart

Her current wealth is estimated at \$66 billion!

If Alice was interested in marriage how would she ever know that any potential suitor was actually interested in her as a person...

...and not her money!

The same goes for beauty.

When a man is resplendently handsome, or a woman is stunning to behold...

...there's always the potential that anyone who pursues that person isn't actually interested in a real relationship, but is only drawn by the lust of the eyes or the lust of the flesh.

So whether it's money, position in life, or good looks, it can be sometimes difficult to know for sure whether a person...

...really loves us simply for who we are, rather than for what they can get out of the relationship.

✓ God's love

Because God doesn't need us, or what we have we can be sure that His love for us is pure and unconditional.

He loves us simply because He is love and can do no other.

Think about it; in every human relationship love is characterized by some mutual benefit that both the lover and the beloved experience.

For example, we may love someone because they are lovable, and that person loves us in return for the love that we lavish upon them.

But, if that person no longer reciprocates the same love that we lavish upon them, or if they choose to love someone else, our love for that person may be diminished, or worse in place of love we may treat them with hatred!

Bottom line—the love of people is conditional.

I love you if you love me and can do something for me.

I love you because you're cute and easy to get along with.

I love you because you're loaded with cash!

But if a person smells badly, or lives on the streets, is chained to some addiction, or is harsh, unloving and selfish...

We may find it difficult to love that person...a person who cannot, or will not reciprocate our love.

Oh we might pity them, but to love that person simply because it's the right thing to do can be challenging.

Such is the nature of human love that is conditional.

Ah, but not so with God!

Because He is self-existent, and does not need to be loved by us, nor does He need anything we have, He is able to love us unconditionally...

...therefore we can be confident in His love for us and that it is unchanging because it's not based on anything that we are, or anything we have!

So God's aseity teaches us that He Who needs nothing, gave us everything including His perfect, unchanging, eternal love...

And without any preconditions, or consideration of our station in life, or the stuff we possess.

His love is perfect, unconditional, and impartial!

And all that all any of us must do to experience that perfect love is simply to receive it!

Ap. Our response

What should we do in response to God's aseity?

We can begin by loving others as God loves us!

Just as God loves us unconditionally regardless of what we have or who we are.

We are now called to love all people, unconditionally regardless of what they have or who they are.

And not just the people that might provide us some benefit for the love we express toward them...

...but to love those who are undesirable, those overlooked and ignored by others, those who have nothing to give in return for our love.

Just as God loves us.

That was Paul's instructions to his friends in Rome! I like the way J.B. Phillips renders the apostle's exhortation...

"Live in harmony with each other. Don't become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people.

Don't become set in your own opinions."

Romans 12:16

So just as our Self-sufficient God loves us regardless of our station in life, and the stuff we possess, meeting us in the depths of our sin and shame...

...so too we are called to love people from every station in life in a way that makes Jesus visible to those we love.

Close

✓ The knowledge of God

The undergirding theme of this series is my assertion...

*That to know Him, is to love Him.
And to know Him better, is to love Him more!*

Now that we better understand God's aseity, His self-sufficiency, we can love Him more because He Who needs nothing has given us everything...

Salvation ~ God's aseity reminds us that God doesn't need us as He is eternally content within the Godhead...

...therefore, we can be confident that there's nothing we can do, and nothing we can be, to earn our salvation rather, His aseity assures us that salvation is a free gift that we receive by faith.

Service ~ God's aseity reminds us that God doesn't need my service as He is able to do all that He desires to be done...

...therefore, we are free to serve Him from a motivation of love rather than out of a guilty conscience or obligation!

Stuff ~ God's aseity reminds us that God doesn't need my stuff because ultimately He owns everything...

...so we can rest in the assurance that His love for us is eternal and unchanging because it is based on His character, not what He can get out of us!

Finally, God's aseity reminds us that while God doesn't need us...He wants us, and that's something wonderful that we can ponder for the rest of the eternity!