

Supplemental images and narrative to
Is Your God Big Enough? Close Enough? You Enough?
Jesus and the Three Faces of God
by Paul Smith



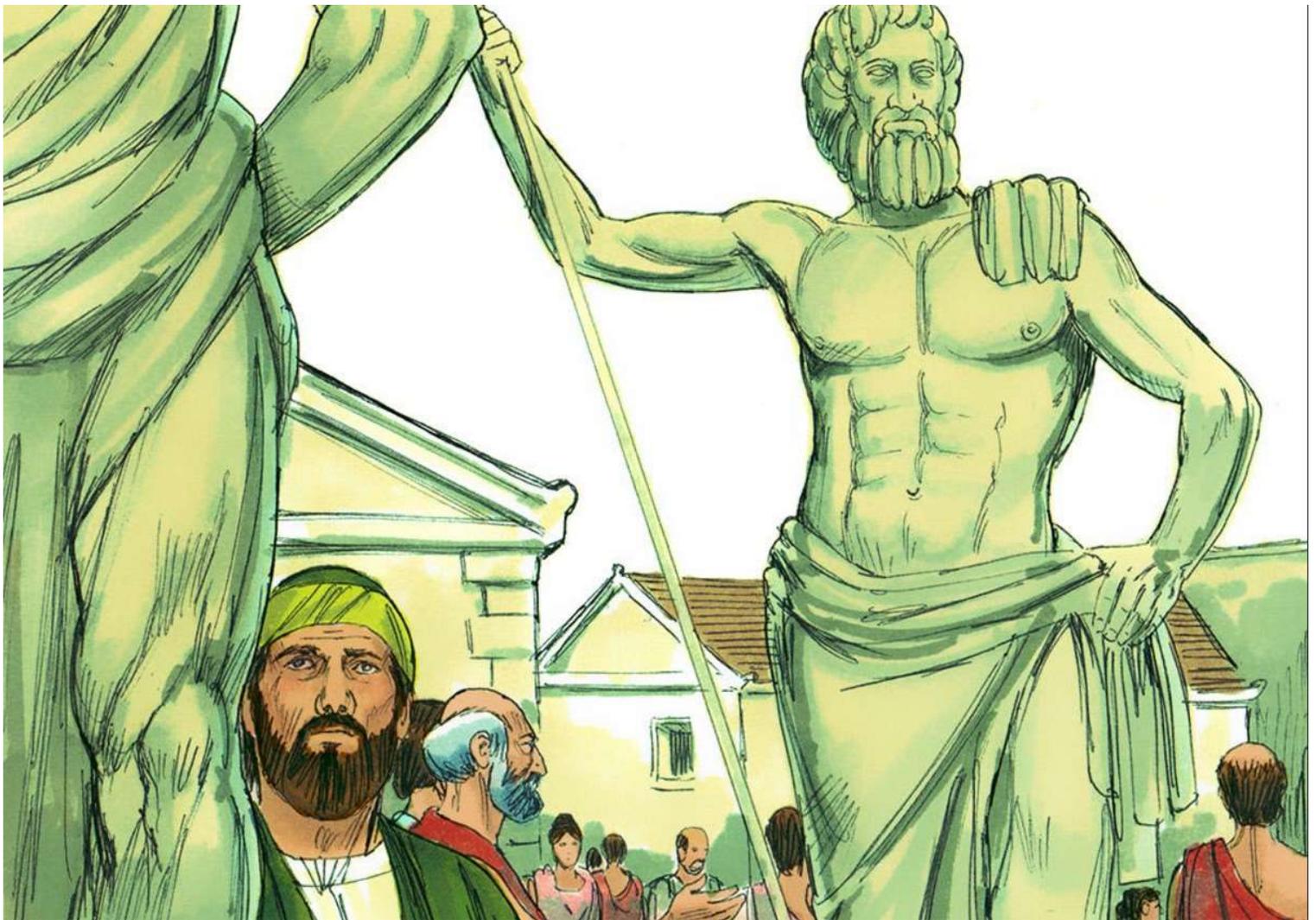
CHAPTER 16
TO AN UNKNOWN GOD
(pages 357-360)

Paul brings the good news about Jesus to Athens, Greece

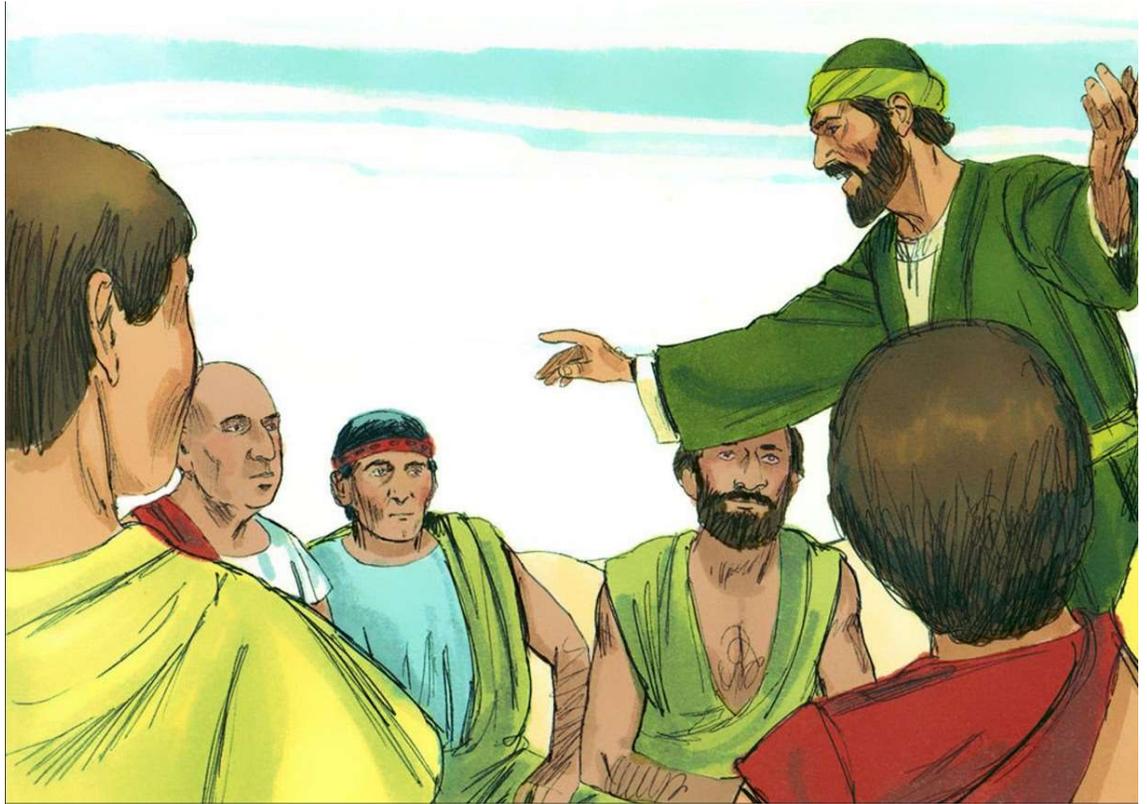


Paul came to Athens, one of the world's earliest democracies to bring the good news of Jesus. The Athenians reflected on matters such as existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language. In many ways the Athenians were very much like educated and thoughtful people in the modern world today.

He had closely viewed the many statues representing the pantheon of the gods of the day. He positively noted that they expressed their desire for spirituality by saying, "I see how extremely religious you are in every way" (Acts 17:22).



Then he wisely began with their own point of reference, an inscription he had seen on one of the many religious altars which read “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.”



Evidently some of the Athenians believed there was another god of whom they had no knowledge and Paul began by saying that he was going to tell them about this unknown god:

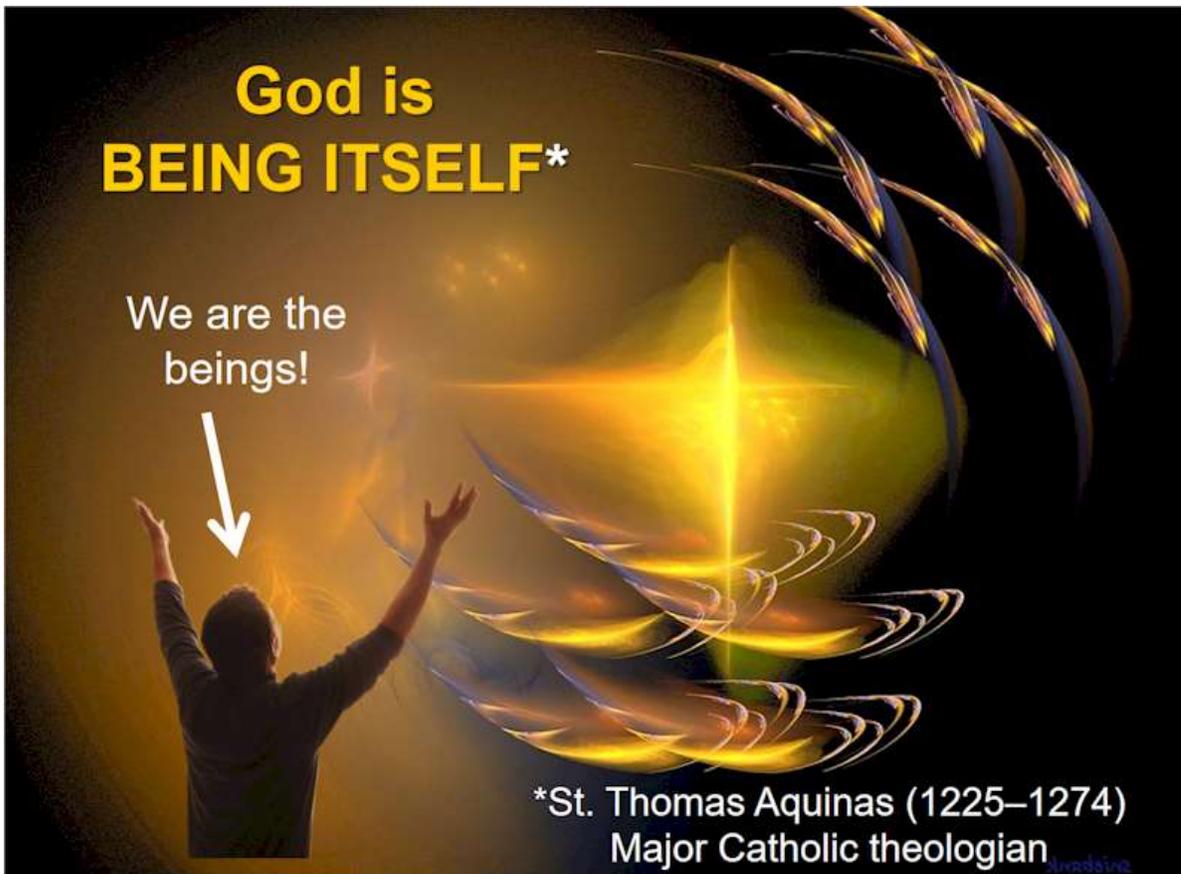
Ancient altar found in Rome with inscription
“To an unknown god.”



Paul points to a BIG God



He said, “The God who made the world and everything in it, the one who is Sovereign of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands . . . God alone gives to all life, breath, and all things. . . . For in God we live and move and have our being.”

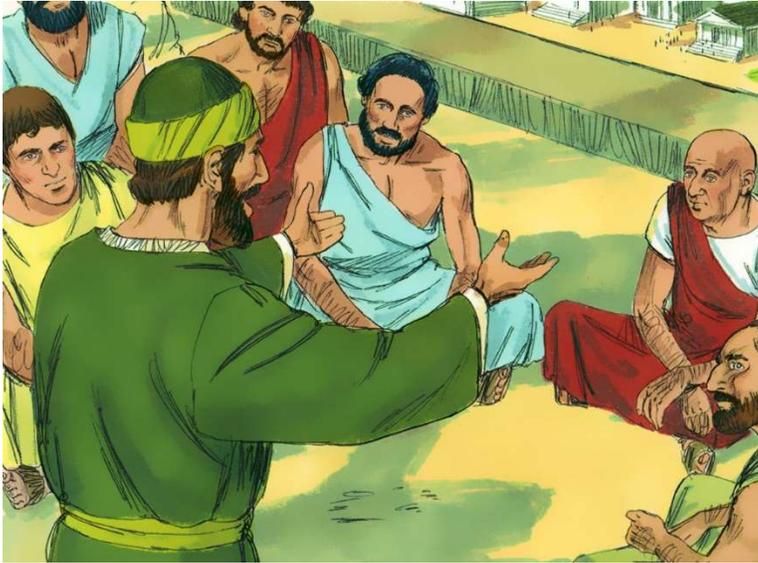


This is the BIG God we began with in Chapter 1 by pointing out that the “I AM” God of Moses is Being Itself.



This is God beyond us

Paul points to a CLOSE God

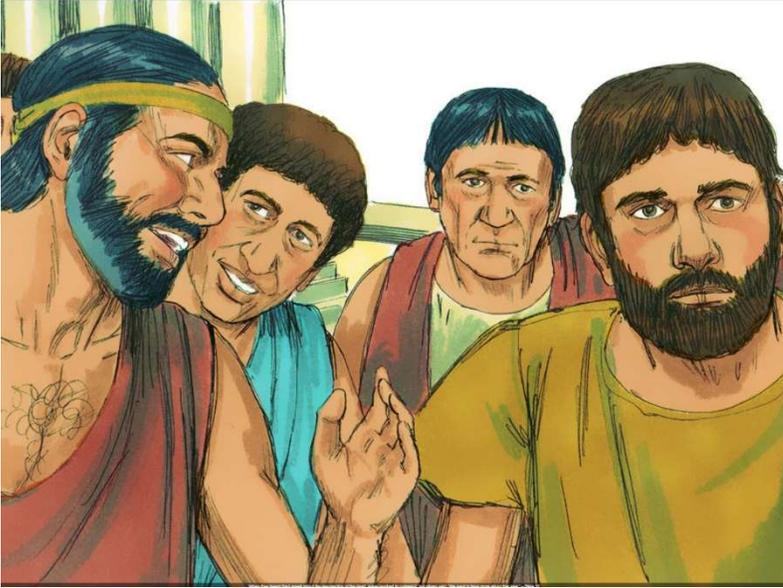


He then refers to the close Face of God when he says that this God is “not far from each one of us.



This is God beside us.

Paul points to a YOU God



Finally, Paul presents the “you” face of God saying, “for we too are God’s offspring.” As “God’s offspring,” we are the descendants of divine parentage, born in God’s very own image and likeness. Just as offspring of fish are fish and offspring of animals are animals, so offspring of God are gods. This is revealed most fully in Jesus’ statement, “You are gods,” and the words in 1 Peter that we are “participants in the divine nature.”



This is God being us

No recognized Christian group today has yet fully acknowledged this unknown God. No widely embraced spiritual path of any tradition has yet integrated each of these three faces of God. Yet, all three were present in an incipient form in original Christianity. And all three Faces of God are present in some form when all current forms of Christianity are combined. On a wider scale, all three dimensions of the Ultimate Mystery are present if we combine all the religions of the world.



At the traditional stage, evangelicals such as Southern Baptist and charismatics invite others to a personal relationship with Jesus, God beside us. However, they tend to have God beyond us as a heavenly being “up there” somewhere who is sometimes loving and sometimes vengeful. This is far from the I AM God of Moses that is Being Itself. Evangelicals consider everyone to be separated from God until they accept Jesus. They believe Jesus was the only divine human being. The understanding that we are all participants in the divine nature as divine beings is considered heretical by most evangelicals.



Joel Osteen pastor of Lakeview Church, largest weekly attendance of any United States church.

Traditional stage Roman Catholics, the largest Christian Church in the world, seek a closeness to God in the Eucharist with varying ideas about God beyond them. They would not place any idea of our divinity in the forefront as the Eastern Orthodox groups do.



At the modern stage, most mainline denominations such as United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and many Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches, aim for a big God but often dismiss a close God and a you God.



Postmodern groups such as Unity, New Age spirituality, and the contemplative prayer movement have usually recovered the understanding and practice of owning our divinity in meditation/contemplation.

Any personal closeness to God in the form of Jesus is suspect as that which has been rejected most strongly from traditional Christianity. The big God often becomes a principle or way of thinking rather than the mystery of Infinite Being Itself.

The Eastern Orthodox, the second largest Christian church in the world, maintains the centrality of the goal of the Christian life of becoming gods (*theosis*, deification, or divinization). However, this is entirely relegated to the next life. Eastern Orthodoxy handles the nonduality of being one with God yet not being the same as God by holding that human beings are united to God through participation in the divine energies and not the divine essence.



The religion of the future

I believe a God by whatever name or form that is big enough, close enough, and us enough can be the unifying feature of all Christian groups. I would extend that to all religious and spiritual paths as they each evolve in all the diverse forms they may take. It is peace among the religions of the world that can lead to peace among the nations of the world.



Integrating the Three Faces of God in the various spiritual paths holds the power to bring us together in greater understanding with one another and release more healing into the world. My prayer is that this book will help us evolve in that direction.