

# “Dark Energy” and the Reality of God

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## Acts 17:24-31

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

“Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

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They say “life is full of surprises.” We all know the feeling when something unexpected occurs that affects our life. Of course, if that “something” isn’t a good thing we could be disappointed. I won’t give examples, because I’m sure we’ve all had such an experience. But if that unexpected “something” is a good thing, it can bring happiness. Two young people meet at a party, discover they have much in common, and pursue the relationship all the way to a solid marriage. Or the boss calls you into his office “out of the blue” and informs you that you’ve been selected to head a new project with a significant pay increase. Or the candidate you’re supporting for public office has been trailing in the polls, but on election day he swamps his opponent against all expectations.

But there are some surprises that puzzle us because we don’t quite know what to make of them. They’re not necessarily good or bad, they’re just surprising because they don’t mesh with what we expected. One of those surprises occurred in 1998 through astronomical research conducted via the orbiting Hubble telescope. Cosmologists — they’re people who study the origin, makeup and destiny of the universe — have dealt for decades with the idea that the universe is still expanding from the original Big Bang. (That was another surprise finding, back in the 1920s.) But many had believed that eventually the universe would stop expanding and, under the influence of gravity, begin to contract and roll back to the central point where it all began. However, the project with the Hubble telescope, measuring light from the most distant galaxies, yielded a different result. Instead of slowing down, the expansion of the universe is accelerating for reasons unknown.

In their consternation over this surprise, scientists have been searching for a theory to explain it. Space isn’t empty; it’s filled with a very thin scattering of matter that can be detected electromagnetically by instruments. But there’s apparently something else in space that instruments can’t detect except by observing its effects on gravity, the weakest of all universal forces. In fact, for the universe to behave the way it does the mass of the universe has to be many times the amount of ordinary matter, which makes up only about five percent of the universe (and stars and planets make up less than one percent!). Something else is there that *can’t be seen*, and physicists therefore call it “dark energy.” Along with it, to a much lesser extent, is what they refer to as “dark matter.” Nobody knows what this invisible energy and matter are made of, but many theorize that dark energy is the force that’s overcoming gravity and pushing the universe outward.

The Hubble Telescope web site puts the matter this way: “It sounds rather strange that we have no firm idea about what makes up 74% of the universe. It’s as though we had explored all the land on the planet Earth and never in all our travels encountered an ocean. But now that we’ve caught sight of the waves, we want to know what this huge, strange, powerful entity really is. The strangeness of dark energy is thrilling. It shows scientists that there is a gap in our

knowledge that needs to be filled, beckoning the way toward an unexplored realm of physics.” ([hubblesite.org](http://hubblesite.org))

Now let’s place this invisible-energy theory together with another scientific fact: the distance between the subatomic particles in every molecule of matter is comparable, at the molecular scale, to the distance between bodies in our solar system. In other words, the distance between the nucleus of an atom and the electrons that “orbit” around it compares with the distance between the sun and planets like the earth, Mars, or Jupiter. What looks like “solid” matter is, in fact, mostly “empty space,” and that includes the physical substance that makes up our own bodies. But now that we know about “dark energy,” is that space really empty?

In the light of the foregoing, let’s look at Genesis 2:7 which speaks of God’s creation of human beings: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” You and I, and every human being, are more than just the “dust from the ground” — the observable material elements that make up our body. That “dust” that seems to form a solid substance is mostly space. But that space isn’t empty. Within that space an invisible energy is at work, the “breath of life.” We can see the effects of life — we can see what life does — but life itself is *invisible*, in the same way the dark energy that makes up most of the universe is invisible. Who knows? They might turn out to be the same thing, since the God who made us also made this vast universe of 200 *billion* galaxies. The further science reaches out into the unknown, the closer it seems to approach things Scripture has already told us.

This discussion of invisible energy at work in the space between galaxies, and in the space between the bits of detectable matter within our own bodies, suggests a new way of looking at God, and of ourselves in relation to God. Well, it’s not really a new way of thinking, because it’s found all through the Bible, but it’s a way most of us aren’t used to. We tend to think of God as being “up there” or “out there,” somewhere remote from us and difficult to access or communicate with. We struggle in prayer, “storming the gates of heaven” in the hope of reaching God with our concerns, the issues of our life. But so often God seems to be inaccessible, hidden behind some sort of barrier. We feel beset by the curse Moses pronounces in Deuteronomy 28:23, “The heavens over your head shall be brass.” We visualize God as a kind of entity floating about in the sky, or in the far reaches of the universe — a visualization ridiculed by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev after Yuri Gagarin, the first Cosmonaut, returned to earth from his space flight. At that time Khrushchev solemnly announced, “Gagarin flew into space, but didn’t see any god there.”

But the Bible has another way of speaking about how God is related to us, directly and through his Son Jesus Christ. Let me give you some examples of that alternative way of visualizing our connection with God:

- In the “Blessing of Moses,” Deuteronomy 33, Moses states, “*The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms*” (Deuteronomy 33:27).
- The apostle Paul, speaking to the Athenians in Acts 17, declares, “*Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’*” (Acts 17:27-28).
- The prophet Isaiah proclaims, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, *and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit*, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (Isaiah 57:15).
- In Ecclesiastes 3 we read this of God: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, *he has put eternity into man’s heart*, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
- The apostle John begins his Gospel with these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and *the life was the light of men*. . . . The true light, *which gives light to everyone*, was coming into the world” (John 1:1-4, 9).
- Psalm 36 celebrates God’s love with these words: “*For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light*” (Psalm 36:9).

- In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul states, “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now *we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God*, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).
- The Psalmist prays, in Psalm 139: “*O LORD, you have searched me and known me! . . . Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? . . . Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. . . . My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them*” (Psalm 139:1, 4, 7, 15-16).
- Paul quotes from Deuteronomy in Romans 10: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? *‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’*” (Romans 10:6-8).
- In his letter to the Colossians, Paul refers to the “mystery” he has been given to proclaim, “which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27).
- In Ephesians 3, Paul prays that his readers may “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be *filled with all the fulness of God*” (Ephesians 3:19).
- In the letter to the Philippians, Paul urges his readers, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for *it is God who works in you*, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).
- In his second letter, the apostle Peter writes these astounding words: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who *called us to his own glory and excellence*, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

This is only a sampling of similar statements throughout Scripture, and these passages add up to a picture of God that’s different from the one we typically visualize. Instead of being distant, remote, somewhere “up in the wild blue yonder,” *God is close to us*. His life is interlocked with ours, for he is the source of our life. Because of the working of his invisible energy within us, our lives are an intersection of heaven and earth; *our space is interlaced with God’s space*. We’re here because he has breathed into us the breath of life, and we live and have our being in him. We don’t have to reach up to some ethereal realm to find him, or dig deep into the abyss of space to discover him. His Word, the expression of his life, is on our lips and alive in our hearts and minds, our innermost being.

Why is this such a strange idea for so many? How did the awareness of this inward and enveloping connection with God get stolen from us, so that we feel separated from our Creator? For the answer we have only to open the Bible to its first chapters, and read how mankind has been torn away from that close fellowship with God in which he could be walking. A hissing voice whispers into our ear, “You don’t have to pay attention to God; you can be just like him, and do whatever *you* want to do.” When we listen to that voice a wall of separation rises up between us and God. We place ourselves into the center of our concern, and so we take the place of God. He becomes our rival, our competitor — or, at best, somebody we have to deal with like *another person outside ourselves*, instead of one whose life is intermingled with ours.

I don’t want to be misunderstood. Scripture makes it clear that even if God’s space and ours intersect, *we’re not God* and can never comprehend the fullness of his reality, in the same way that the so-called “dark energy” of the universe remains a mystery to science. Isaiah reminds us of this in a familiar passage: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Being close to God, and sensing his life flowing through you, isn’t the same thing as being God.

Nevertheless, to be separated from God — to allow a barrier to rise up between our life and the One who is the source of our life — is what the Bible calls *sin*. In Scripture, sin takes two

basic forms. The Hebrew word means *transgressing*, trespassing into territory that belongs to God alone, which is what we're doing when we say, "I'll just do it *my way*." The Greek word means *falling short*, "missing the mark," which is what we're doing when we say, "I don't need to concern myself with God." As you can see, these really amount to the same thing. They both cancel out that intersection between our lives and God's life, and stifle the breath of his life within us.

How does that breath of life come back to us, so we can become what the apostle Peter calls "partakers of the divine nature?" The Bible has a plan to bring back that connection we, as creatures made in God's image, have lost through sin. Did you know that the Bible is divided into two parts — not the Old Testament and the New, but two parts I call the *problem* and the *solution*. The problem is set out in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, and the solution begins with chapter 12. That first part tells how the image of God in mankind was compromised when people tried to trespass into his territory. Eventually their overreach came to the point where people said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4). Starting with chapter 12 God begins to undo the damage by calling Abraham to turn his back on that corrupt culture and become father of a people who would bring God's blessing to the rest of the world.

Sadly, the very people who were supposed to be part of the solution fell back into the original problem, because they thought the way of life God had given them was all about them. The wall of separation between God and mankind never came down. There's some heavy biblical theology here, involving Israel and the Law of Moses, and how the purpose of the Law got turned around the wrong way, but there isn't space to go into the details. What God did about it was to *send one man to undo the damage*. The apostle Paul lays it out like this: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus comes as the One in whom the separation between our life of dust and the invisible energy of the Creator has been broken down at last. "I and the Father are one," he tells us (John 10:30); "he who has seen me has seen the Father;" (John 14:9). Messiah Jesus takes all Israel into himself, and carries that barrier of sin to the cross. On that cross he gives voice to that separation between us and God when he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). When Jesus dies that barrier dies with him. But, because Jesus is who he is, as Peter declares, it's not possible for death to hold him (Acts 2:24). Raised from death, Jesus lives the life interlaced with the life of God, in which there's no barrier blocking access to the divine energy.

The invisible energy of God, which the Scriptures see embodied in the Holy Spirit or the breath of God, is within every human being but only Jesus can release it within us. The way to reconnect with that lost breath of divine life is to *become a member of Jesus*, whom the apostle Paul calls "the first-born from the dead" in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:18-19). "If any one is in Christ," Paul states, "he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul describes the process this way:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:3-6).*

Jesus, in his resurrection life, reopens our connection with the breath of God. He makes it possible for us to know and experience that interlacing of God's space with our space. We are, in Paul's phrase, "saved by his life" (Romans 5:10) in order to realize "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). The biblical words for "glory" mean "weight, heaviness, mass," and we're reminded that three-quarters of the mass of the universe consists of that mysterious "dark energy." Through the Messiah that glory is released in us, as a radiant source of knowledge, and healing, and blessing. "For those whom he foreknew . . . he also called," Paul writes, "and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Romans 8:29-

30). We're not just miserable sinners whining about our shortcomings, pounding on the doors of heaven in hopes of prying some crumb of benefit from a begrudging deity. Instead, we "live and move and have our being" in God and therefore we're "partakers of the divine nature," "filled with the fullness of God."

Yes, "life is full of surprises." Coming into the realization of how your life is interlaced with the life of God might just be the biggest surprise of your life. You and I might be astonished to discover that, contrary to all previous expectations, our life is filled with the glory and power of God. As Jesus declared (John 7:38-39), "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart [his innermost being] will flow rivers of living water.'" And the apostle John goes on to explain, "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive." A woman was healed when the "virtue" of Jesus flowed into her body as she touched the fringe of his garment (Luke 8:43-44). But the same thing happened with the apostles; people were healed when even Peter's shadow fell upon them (Acts 5:15), or when cloths were carried from Paul's body and laid upon the sick (Acts 19:11-12). Are we not invited to share in the same apostolic mission, *to transmit the invisible, healing energy of God* into the hurting and desperate lives of others?

Our basic problem isn't our dysfunctional relationships, or guilt over our misdeeds, or the hurts we hold from experiences long past — those things we pray to some remote God outside of ourselves to get rid of. *Our problem is our concept of God — who he is and how we're connected to him.* Do we dare to change our thinking about God? Can we quit visualizing him as some remote entity "out there" whom we have to plead with and cajole to get him to hear us? Can we trust that "the eternal God is our dwelling place," and simply fall back into his "everlasting arms"? Shall we not look for God, as Paul says, "on our lips and in our heart"? Do we dare let that hidden energy of God, that glory, that Holy Spirit, come forth from within us as Jesus releases it? As Paul admonished Timothy, "Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6). I dare you to do that, and I venture to predict that if we take that step the results in your life and mine will indeed be surprising.

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