

### The Unknown God We Know

By Pastor Josh Stringer

“Men and women of Chicagoland, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For I passed along and observed the objects of your worship.” These might have been the words of Paul to us had he taxied himself around the streets of our community instead of walking the dusty roads of Athens in the first century. Paul’s observation to the “men of Athens” in Acts 17 was that, within their culture, they were quite devoted, religious practitioners. So much so that there was an altar to an unknown god. You know, just in case they forgot one.

Our community and culture are no different than Athens. We might not have altars to unknown gods to soothe a forgetful conscience, but we do have a variety of houses of worship, complete with unique rituals, liturgy and holidays.

There are many points you could make about Acts 17, but for the purposes of this article, we must observe Paul’s willingness to engage the Athenians on their own terms and turf. Paul was observant and respectful. He was clear, truthful and bold. But, he was not in a church or synagogue. He didn’t pass out fliers or create Twitter ads for all who were interested to come and see his big event at his place. He didn’t tell his travel companions to go out and invite their friends. He went to them.

So, how can we be like Paul and take the gospel to our community through the vehicle of cultural religion?

On February 5, 2017, we will celebrate one of our country’s largest cultural religious holidays. Of course, I’m talking about the Super Bowl. You might scoff at the popularity of professional football, but you can’t deny the religious nature by which we celebrate this cultural holiday. The temple is decorated from end zone to end zone. Songs are strategically placed at the beginning and in the middle. The festive food is baked, fried, brewed and grilled. Some grown-ups even paint their faces and robe themselves in ceremonial garments called jerseys with other men’s names on the back. Most people are unable to attend at the temple and will instead gather with friends and family to observe the service in their homes. Should I go on? This is kind of fun.

You see what I’m saying, right? The Super Bowl is the cultural equivalent of celebrating Advent or the Resurrection. We might recoil at the lewdness of a commercial or disengage because of



the unpredictable nature of the half-time show, and rightly so, from the perspective of personal holiness. But what if we saw this as an opportunity to engage our culture on their terms, rather than lament the Athenians worshipping at the altar of a false god?

You might not feel like you’re able to stand at our cultural center and go toe-to-toe with philosophical heavyweights like Paul. However, like Paul, there are plenty of ways to engage with our community on these “super” terms and be a bright witness for Jesus. The typical response is to host a party. But don’t just invite all the people that you’re comfortable with or that you know the best. Better yet, accept that invite from a neighbor and attend a party at his house. If you don’t know your neighbors, first, there’s no excuse. Second, there’s no time like the present! Even if you don’t like football or your team isn’t in it, go anyway. There’s nothing immoral or unbiblical about having fun and going “to them.” Maybe the fact that we see it as an “us versus them” issue is part of the problem. But that’s a whole other matter.

In the meantime, eat buffalo wings sacrificed in observance of this cultural holiday with a clean conscience. Know and love your neighbor, look for windows to tell ‘em about Jesus—and go Falcons! 3-2-1, break!

**“God’s thoughts, his will, his love, his judgments are all man’s home.  
To think his thoughts, to choose his will,  
to love his loves, to judge his judgments,  
and thus to know that he is in us, is to be at home.”**

**—George Macdonald**