

Acts 17:22–34



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22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

23 “For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

24 “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’

29 “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

30 “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.”

33 So Paul went out of their midst.

34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The context for our passage is Paul in Athens, a city full of idols. The Athenians were idol worshipers and it was deeply disturbing to the spirit of Paul to see such religious misalignment. Athens was a city of religious interest and a mental ascent to deity but deeply doused in darkness, devoid of the light of the one true God. Paul had identified his striking point and this passage is a clinic on evangelism to deists. Much of America, especially here in the Bible belt, would hear a message similar to this were Paul to visit us. So pay attention, there's some incredible lessons here in how to evangelize right here in Maryville.



God is not a mere intellectual exercise, he is the creator and judge of all men and it is given to us to repent. This isn't a sport, it's salvation.



22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

The first key element of Paul's presentation is striking at the heart of the whole issue. Religion. The Athenians are religious. Great. So what? Religion isn't what they need. It wasn't enough. Religion was their hobby, their pastime, their pride. Exercising their intellect but leaving their hearts unbent to the one true God.

This is reasonable when studying idols but Paul's argument will be that Christ the resurrected is not just another deity to consider but the one Creator and Judge. His will be a presentation of uniqueness requiring more than mere contemplation.



23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

And here is the sum of the variables. Ignorant worship is problematic. Where the Athenians put worship before knowledge Paul aimed to proclaim a corrective to perspective. Scattershot worship is worthless. It must be properly oriented and informed.



24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;
25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

The meat of Paul's argument is the great paradox that it is not men who give to God but rather God who gives to us. Idols are the creation of man but rather man is the creation of God.



Psalms 115:4–8 (NASB95)

4 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands.
5 They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see;
6 They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell;
7 They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat.
8 Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them.

God is the giver, man is the receiver. God is the creator, man is the creature. And just like that Paul takes the Athenians pyramid of power, priority and importance and turns it on its head. Man at the bottom and God at the top. Man is not the point of creation, God is. Man is not the point of worship, God is. Man is not the point of the cross, God is. God is the center of everything. We are pieces in the story God is working to glorify and point to himself. We exist to glorify and illustrate his attributes.

I think you know this but I cannot stress heavily enough how easily this slips from our attention. We need to think about this all the time. We need this mantra memorized like our own names. We exist as vessels of the magnificence of God. Either willingly, blessed, as forgiven children, or as condemned outcasts, frames showcasing the justice of the wrath of God against rebellion.



26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,
27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

At first glance it may appear the Athenians were making too much of being religious and spiritual but in fact it was not an issue of amount or intensity but orientation and emphasis. All their efforts were oriented around their own importance, intelligence and miscellaneous obligations to appease a confused conscience.

Paul's argument puts man hopelessly below the creator pressing that for all our thinking we don't know the next thing about God actually. How could we? He's God and we are but his mere creatures. Our best and brightest brain work is just a blind groping about at the crumbs of infinite almighty God. We only know what he places before us.



28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'
29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

God is not perceived into existence by man. He is the creator of man.



Colossians 1:16–17 (NASB95)

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.
17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Man and their intellect or experience is not at the center of reality. God is. Everything is for him. Paul is dramatically but deftly turning the tables on the Athenians from intellectual mind games to a much deeper reality and responsibility. This isn't a hobby or sport any more. This is getting serious.

This is where we need to take people. To the point they're actually at. Weak, human, standing before their creator, hopeless except for his own merciful hand reaching out in forgiveness for their sin and rebellion.



30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,
31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

The crux of the issue for Paul is the consequence. For all the intellectual exercises the danger of idolatry is eternal death for unforgiven sin. The Athenians were so preoccupied with the fun of religious debate they missed the point of their sin and need to be forgiven before the judgement.

This is not an isolated issue. This is our issue. It is far too common to be consumed with spiritual sports and miss the coming day of judgement. We read up on the books, we have our favorite preachers and artists, we have our pet doctrines and philosophies. This happens both inside and outside of Christianity. Humans love to be distracted with the poison of missing the point.

Paul cuts away all the cruff of argument, debate and discussion and get's right to the heart of the issue. God is your creator, God is your judge, and you need to repent and be forgiven while you can by the sacrifice of Christ who died to save and rose to judge.



32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

33 So Paul went out of their midst.

34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Wherever the gospel is preached there are these three responses. Rejection, indecision and acceptance. Which one are you? I know we keep hitting on this week after week, but some of you are yet unrepentant, sneering or indecisive week by week. Why? Why roll the dice against your eternity? Why play spiritual sports? This isn't a game. It's the truth. Cast aside your idols and turn to know and worship the one true God by forgiveness through repentance.



God is not a mere intellectual exercise, he is the creator and judge of all men and it is given to us to repent. This isn't a sport, it's salvation.

So repent.

And for those who are repentant what a presentation! God as creator, man as creature. Casting aside the entertainment of religion for the meat of repentance. Model this, bake this into your identity. Let this come from you as you exist before unbelievers.