

Acts 17:16-31 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore

you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ 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, ²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ 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.'

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ 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.”

I greet you with grace, mercy and peace from God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, and the Holy Spirit, who lives within us as believers, empowering us.

The city of Athens, Greece, in the first century, was not that much different from our modern world. As the apostle Paul was walking through the streets of the ancient city, “**his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.**” Paul was overwhelmed by the reality that so many people were believing a lie, thinking it was the truth. Many people were very sure and very wrong at the same time. They did not know the true God, and Paul knew those people would be lost forever, suffering in hell to pay for their sins. God loved and cared for those people. God expresses the same kind of love

and care when he spoke of the city of Nineveh to Jonah, defending the need for repentance, saying, **“And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”** Jonah 4:11 (ESV)

Paul's message was that this does not have to be, since God has already given assurance to all by raising Jesus from the dead.

MESSAGE TO ALL

Paul began to speak in the marketplace to anyone who would hear. He spoke to the Jews in their synagogues. He spoke to the Epicurean's, who, much like today's materialistic people, taught that life was to be the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain and that your existence ended at death. He spoke to the Stoic Philosophers, who saw self-mastery as the greatest virtue. Indifferent to pleasure and pain, these pantheists acted god-like in everything they did, like Hinduists of today. While all of these philosophies were at odds with each other, they were united in their opposition to Paul, so he was brought to the Aeropagus.

Our lesson from the book of Acts contains Paul's address to the men of Athens at the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a place where men would tell about and listen to new ideas -- somewhat like a court. Paul's message presented an understanding of the true God that had always been there, desiring to be known. That saving message that Paul brought has three parts: God Is, Who God Is, and God Commands.

GOD IS

In order to make a connection with his audience, he noted the many statues of idols, particularly the altar to the unknown god. Paul began by saying that they were religious people. He started at a point at which they could agree and proclaimed what he knew. When you share God's word, you can follow Paul's example, as well. Start where people are, and connect to what you know.

The Bible also begins like that, not with a debate, but a declaration, stating, **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** (Genesis 1:1 ESV) God is here for all to see. Psalm 19 says, **“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.** (Psalm 19:1 ESV) His work cries out about His existence. In Hebrews 4 it says, **“(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)”** (Hebrews 4:3 ESV) Paul writes to the Romans, **“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, every since the**

creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse....the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness..." (Romans 1:20,2:15 ESV) The witness of creation, the bearing of conscience, and even Jesus stating, **"the scriptures...bear witness about me."** (John 5:39 ESV) In the Bible, the truth is there for anyone to see.

WHO GOD IS

Next Paul speaks of who that God is, saying, ²⁴ **The God who made the world ... does not live in temples made by man,** ²⁵ **...he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.** ²⁶ **... he made from one man every nation...having determined...the boundaries...** ²⁷ **that they should seek God, ..."** (Acts 17:24-25 ESV) This is the creator. He is everywhere, giving life, making man and nations, making determinations, so people would seek Him. This idea is denied by most people in our world today.

Many teach that evolution that brought us here. They teach evolution as fact, even though it is not even a scientific theory. It is an idea that can not be tested, observed, or repeated. It violates the 2nd law of thermodynamics, a well-established theory that demonstrates that the tendency is from order to disorder. This is the polar opposite of the mindless process of evolution, a system in which things are ordered by chance, which is impossible.

The concept of something from nothing is also impossible. However, fossil records clearly indicate rapid burial and sorting, which can be explained by the Biblical Flood. These fossils also show distinct species, not small changes, which are all evidence of creation. It actually takes blind faith to believe in evolution.

In Colossians, it states of Jesus, **"..all thing were created through him and for him....and in him all things hold together."** (Colossians 1:16-17 ESV) Jesus created and holds together the very life you have. It is a gift from him. We know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19) This God brought us into existence, defines our boundaries and determines all that we should seek. God told Jeremiah, **"You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart."** (Jeremiah 29:13 ESV) He is here for you, revealed in the Bible.

GOD COMMANDS

Finally, Paul warns the hearers of his message, which includes us, ³⁰ **...he commands all people everywhere to repent,** Why? ³¹ **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 "** (Acts 17:30-31 ESV) Righteousness, assurance and resurrection was foretold by

Jesus, and His followers believed when they saw. Many even gave their lives for testifying to the reality of the resurrected Lord. Everyone needs to hear the call, turn from, or repent of, their sins and receive Jesus as the Savior and Lord that He is, receiving the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life. The reaction to Paul is given in the next verses, which also happens to be the same way people react today, it says, “**some mocked...others said, We will hear you again...but some men joined him and believed** “ (Acts 17: 32-34 ESV) Even today, there are those who ridicule or mock, those who wait and see, and those with true faith. The wait and see crowd never heard from Paul again, as he left Athens after this. That is a warning to all of us, not to wait, but as it says in 2nd Corinthians, “**...Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.**” (2 Corinthians 6:2 ESV) Believe today, and live in that faith. The Holy Spirit equips you each day so, just like Paul, you can boldly confess what you know to be true. The world so needs the message of the gospel. May we hear the urgent need to bring the saving message of Jesus to a hurting world. Live in that assurance.

In His name we pray, AMEN. May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.