

# The Gospel in a Multicultural Day

*Various*

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The book of Acts chapter 17.

Normally we are engaged in a series and we are presently in a series called the book of Romans and we are going to take this Lord's Day and next Lord's Day and move out of that series. And as I was praying about what to preach in light of our friend day, in light of Easter and everything that was involved with that, just immediately came into my mind, Acts chapter 17.

So you say to yourself, "Well, how does a preacher know if that is what the Lord has him to preach on?"

Well, we don't see visions or dreams or anything like that. But we will pray about it and many, many times there will be a text that will lodge into our minds and we just take that and trust that that is what the Lord would have for us for the day. And that has never failed through all these years.

So Acts chapter 17 and I want to begin reading in verse 16 all the way down through the end of the chapter. And what we are going to find out here this morning is that Paul is going to deliver a defense here in light of a multi pluralistic society and that society is rapidly becoming just like our society is today and so we will see the relevancy of this as we go to the text.

Acts chapter 17 and verse 16.

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest

certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; either is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.<sup>1</sup>

You know, folks, there is nothing new under the sun. The days in which we live in today have been lived in before. The problems that we encounter today, though they may take on much more monetary numbers, have been encountered before. In fact, man has a propensity to keep repeating history.

There is saying that if you don't learn from history you fail to—have you heard this—repeat history. But the sadder truth is that even those who have learned from history still repeat history. Man is a sad specimen of repetition of sin and decay and failure. And thank God for a living God who intervenes into the hearts in men and women and boys and girls and holds back the tide of destruction that is threatening like a flood every day of our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:16-34.

There's people today in hospitals that are under the threat of the decay of the body. Many of us have known what it is to study for a test and have a decay of mind on test day and you can't remember what you think you have already learned.

Life is frustrating, isn't it?

And here in Paul's day this city of Athens which today is the modern capital of Greece--- although it was not the capital then---this city of Athens was known for its religious pluralism. In fact, you will notice here that in verse 16 that Paul was wholly stirred when he saw the city given over to idolatry. And that was an understatement.

The city of Athens was known for its religious devotion. In fact, one historian has wrote concerning the city of Athens in Paul's day that there was over---are you ready for this--- 30,000 statues to false gods here in this city. And that did not include the private statues and idols that they had in their homes. So this was 30,000. There were 30,000 statues and idols that men used to worship false gods.

Another historian wrote, kind of tongue in cheek or probably had some truth to it, he said, concerning the city, quote, "It is easier to find a god in Athens than men." That is how many false deities that they had there in that city.

Not only did they have a multitude of idols and statues and religious devotion and temples in that city, they also had philosophy that was going on in that city. And that philosophy is seen here. If you look at verse 18 it says there were certain philosophers of the Epicureans and the Stoics, that they encountered him. And what they did when they met up with that apostle was is that they debated against him.

We live in a nation of multi pluralism, do we not? And even though there may not be 30,000 statues and idols and shrines out there that men are falling down and worship, it is true in our nation that there is probably---definitely down South---there is probably on every city block or so some form of a church or something that calls itself a church.

I am finding more and more in my own neighborhood that there are material things out there that represent false deities. There is new age things. Have you ever gone out and you see these balls that people have in their yards? That is a new age type of worship that is going on. You may walk up into somebody's yard and they might have an idol of Mary or some other statue out there on their lawn.

Turn on the radio and there is theological argumentation and preaching going on all the time. And if it is not on some Christian radio or so called Christian radio, then you get the religion of the world through the television and radio and internet every day. Even our own culture is teaching certain things to us even as we are listening to advertisements and reading billboards and reading books and newspapers and seeing certain news over the internet or email or however you get your form of information.

We are a nation that is multi pluralistic and full of idolatry.

And we are full of the philosophy of the Epicureans and the Stoics. In fact, these two philosophies have infiltrated the Church today. Let me give you a description of these two groups.

The Epicureans held a philosophy that emphasized feeling, the sense, what you could taste and touch and see and hear and feel. In fact, their motto in life was “Eat, drink and find pleasure because one day we will what? We will die.” The Epicureans did not believe that there was any type of deity that exerted influence on modern culture. They believed that culture was all according to their own efforts and their own labors and their own intellect. They did acknowledge that there were certain deities, but they would never think that any deity would bear any type of control or influence on any culture whatsoever.

They didn’t believe in providence—that is, God is the sustainer of all things. They held that we had no accountability to any deity nor was there any future wrath. All that mattered in this life was their senses, their feelings.

Do we have that going on today? People get down. They want to get their senses up. What do they do? Well, they will turn on radio or music or they will go shopping.

I couldn’t believe when our former president got up and said, “Help the economy, go out and buy something.” We are already in debt trillions of dollars over our heads. In other words, what he is saying is, “You know, if you feel down, go out and buy something to fulfill that happiness.”

Or you could go out and get a Budweiser or an alcoholic beverage or you could go out and crank up the music and make it so loud that it just literally blasts your feelings from one side of the room to the other. You can dance and have good times and laugh. All of this is the feeding of our what? It is the feeding of our senses, of our desires. And that type of philosophy has entered into our churches today. For our churches have now turned into places of entertainment because they say—and I am not quoting, but I am pretty close—they say, “Well, people won’t come unless you give them that which feeds their senses. And that is probably true to some degree, but that is not where we are trying to reach.

And there is discussion even within orthodox Christianity about moving in that direction. And I want to remind you and I want you to look at verse 18 again. It was that philosophy that directly encountered Paul and debated with him. In other words, this philosophy is not Christian.

There is a second group as we are looking at the background here before we actually get into the text, that had a deep influence and also encountered Paul and debated with him. And this philosophy is much more predominant in orthodox Christianity. And that is the

stoics. You will see that in verse 18 when it says, "Certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him."<sup>2</sup>

Now the Stoics would have nothing to do with the Epicureans at all. In fact, their understanding of things was to be summed up as almost the exact opposite than the Epicureans. The Stoics' philosophy was that they emphasized values and virtue.

Have you heard the term value any in our society? What is your values? They emphasized values and purity and virtue. The Stoics believed that feeling, that is your senses, your pleasures, they were there. And certainly you had to deal with that. But all of those feelings and pleasures and senses must be subject to man's reason. So it was his intellect that was being emphasized here. They believed that men must become independent of the common pleasures of life and the common sufferings of life and their philosophy could be summed up in a type of fatalism. Well, whatever will be will be. It doesn't matter what I do. And we certainly don't want to be fornicators and we certainly don't want to be idolaters and we must make sure that all religion makes sense and we mustn't give in to all of our feelings and we must be self disciplined.

This was the Stoic view of society.

Have you ever heard someone call another person stoic? This is what they are referring to. There is this kind of rigidity and flat effect that says this is what is right and I am going to do it. There is no compassion. There is no feeling or anything just behind that. Just this icy steeled this is what is virtuous and this is what we are going to do.

And do you know what? That sounds pretty good, doesn't it, in some respects. But if you will notice again in verse 18, that philosophy encountered the gospel.

Stoicism is not Christianity although in some cases it is brought off as a guise or a cover for a certain Christian movement.

What we have here is we are setting up the apostle is we have a city that is much like today. We live in a nation that has a multitude of idols and statues and religious services and theological confusion that is out there. We have the philosophy, "Eat, drink and be merry because one day we are going to die. And How we know that God is blessing us is if he gives us a lot of eating and a lot of drinking and a lot of pleasures. Then God is blessing me."

And then there's people who say, "Oh, no, we don't want that because that is immoral. What we want is virtue and self discipline in our life and things have to be subjected to reason and to intellect and what other people educationally have to say."

This was the city that Paul came into.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 17:18.

Now, folks if you were encountering a city like that, how would you reach them with the gospel? What do you think? Do you think you would get a van and take them out there and draw everybody in, you know, play a little mixture of music both good and kind of moderately bad, you know, you want to get people to come so you will get a hearing? Do you think Paul would have done that?

Or do you think Paul would have emphasized, you know, what you really need is to be self disciplined and you kind of need to resolve yourself? Can't you see that your values are wrong and what you need are good Christian values? I am quoting there. Do you think Paul would have said that?

You think Paul would have said, "Now, really, what you need to do is everybody knows these idols are wrong and what you need to do is get up there and preach a really condemnatory message up there and tell them to get all these idols out of here. It is hedonish"? Do you think Paul would have approached it that way?

Let's see how Paul uses the gospel in a multi cultural, multi pluralistic society.

You will notice in verses 16 through 21 the background of this which is going to bring him to this defense. You might learn some things about this. I certainly did as I went through here. But you will notice in verse 16 that Paul, he was left alone in Athens and while he was left alone from Timothy and Silas, while he was waiting there he took a survey of the city.

You will notice in verse 16, "While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him,"<sup>3</sup> now note this, "When he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."<sup>4</sup> So Paul had surveyed the city. He had gone through there, had gotten enough knowledge of what was going on in that city and his observation was that this was a city that was given over to idolatry, multiple gods.

And the response of his Spirit—now look in verse 16—the response of his spirit to that multiplicity of idolatry and untruth was that he was stirred. Now this word "stirred" means that he is spirit response to that idolatry was one of anger and that anger motivated him to a certain direction. It wasn't one of accommodation. It wasn't one of saying, "Well, you know, here is a big city. Who in the world is going to be able to reach this city and I am alone and I am one guy and what can I do and better sit in the corner and write diatribes against everything that is going on here."

He was stirred to anger, but it was what he did with that anger, folks. That anger did not stir him up to condemn everybody. That anger stirred him up to what? Preach.

In other words, folks, when people are in untruth, when the gospel is not seated and flourishing in a particular geographical area it is not time to go out and preach condemnation. It is time to give them the answer. And the answer is the gospel. And so

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

yes he was motivated in his own heart and angry because of what he saw, but it motivated him to preach.

And you will see that in verse 17 when it says, “Therefore.” Because his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, even though he was alone, “Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.”<sup>5</sup>

What he did was is he went immediately into those Jewish synagogues and he began to reason with them, with the Jews, out of the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is the Savior. He is the Messiah. And it was a disputation. In other words, folks, there was strong conversation and dialog and reasoning that was going on between those two parties. Not only did he go into the Jewish synagogues, but he also met with devout persons. He didn’t shy away from people that were religious.

You know, religious people need to be saved. And here is Paul out there. And what he is doing, again, he is strongly engaging them, encountering them with the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And not only that, that wasn’t enough, but in verse 17 he placed himself in the market place where there were hundreds, maybe thousands of people in the market. He was out there and was meeting with people very what? Every day.

And do you know what the response to all that was? Nothing, not at this point.

When he met in a Jewish synagogue all he was getting was rebuttal. When he met with the devout people, the religious people, all he was getting was rebuttal. When he was out there in the marketplace daily all that he was getting at all times was rebuttal.

Do you think that discouraged Paul? He just kept right on what? Giving the gospel.

His anger, his spirit being stirred within him motivated him to give the gospel even though in most cases he preached that gospel with others around him, but here he is all alone and he is out there preaching the gospel and it is a city of a hundred of thousands of people. It is amazing.

You say, “What am I going to do?”

Well, it has got to start somewhere.

And what happened was is that Paul ended up not only being rebutted, Paul was shamed. You know, in 1 Corinthians chapter one it says, Paul writes, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks [what?].”<sup>6</sup> How does our King James version word that? “... to the Greeks foolishness,”<sup>7</sup> moronic.

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:17.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Ibid.

And that is exactly the way these people were treating him.

You will notice in verse 18. Look at the description. And it says in the middle of that verse, “And some said, What will this babblers say?”<sup>8</sup>

Have you ever been called a babblers? That was not a term of nicety. That was a term of shame.

Not only is he encountering the devout people, the religious people and the Jewish people. And not only is he encountering people every day in the public market place, but they he got a hold of these philosophers of the Epicureans and they, too, encountered against him, those who emphasized their senses came directly against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“And the Stoicks,”<sup>9</sup> verse 18, “encountered him,”<sup>10</sup> those who would say, “No, it is self discipline and values and high morals and that is what we need to have. We just have certain things in place and we taught our kids these values and then we would be ok.

The gospel knows nothing of that. The gospel only knows one thing: Jesus Christ and him saving us from our sin. That is all that the gospel knows.

And so, folks, we should not ourselves be discouraged if Jewish people rebut us or your neighbors that are religious rebut you or just the common folk in the marketplace that might be worshipper of one of these over 30,000 statues that are there in the city and accepted as cultural, culturally ok. Nor should it surprise you if people who live off their feelings, their senses, gratifying them, strengthening them, if they, too, get upset at your preaching of the gospel.

And it should not surprise us if people who are self disciplined and pride themselves on their values also rebut the gospel. Why? Because the gospel crushes human pride.

And so they reasoned against the gospel and they called him a babblers. This word “babblers” in our Greek New Testament refers to someone who is an ignorant show off. The root of it refers to a seed picker. Have you ever seen somebody pick seeds? And it refers to someone who would like pick seeds and they would pick this type of knowledge and this type of knowledge and this amount of information and maybe some information from over here and they would bring in together all those seeds and they would try to make it make sense and play it off on people as if it was really true. This is what they were saying about Paul and his gospel, that he was just gathering bits of information from hither and there and he was just putting them together and trying to pass it off as being genuine. He was a babblers.

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<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



Ad then there were other people saying, “You know, verse 18 he seems to be setting forth some kind of strange god, some kind of new God out here.”

Now why is that important? Well, that is important because the city of Athens had a law that they had finally had enough gods and that there could be no new god introduced into that city. And here is the apostle and he is preaching Jesus and the resurrection and it sounds like that he is giving a new what? A new God because Jesus is God in human flesh.

So what happens is, look at verse 19. Do you see the first four words there? They what? Took him. “They took him, and brought him unto Areopagus.”<sup>11</sup> And what Areopagus was was the place where ... it was a mount where the judges of the city came together to pass judgments on certain laws that were being broken or needed to be made.

So what is happening here is that Paul is being escorted—rather nicely, by the way—he is being escorted right before a type of judgment hearing. We would call that kind of like a pretrial. He is really not charged with anything, but he is going to be brought before this hearing of judges and important people of that city because he seems to be someone that is bringing in a new what? So they thought maybe they had some legality that they could use to silence him and get him out of the city.

So he is being brought into a place of judgment in Athens for this type of hearing before cultural elites and educated men.

And so they asked him, verse 19, ‘Tell us of this new doctrine. You are bringing strange things to our ears and we want to know what these mean.’<sup>12</sup>

Not only did they prohibit new gods from coming in, but they also had an itching ear to hear curiosities and new things that were going on. Kind of like today, right? We don’t want to hear the old. We have to invent the new.

And so, folks, what we have here—we have gone extensively into the background here—what we have here sounds in its infancy kind of like American culture. So what is Paul doing to counter that? What is he doing to try to bring truth into the situation? He is what? He is proclaiming. He is talking in the marketplace just like God has commanded each one of us to talk to our neighbors, to our employers, to those where we are at, the Walmarts and the Krogers and the [?]. Wherever we are at talk to people.

You say, “Yeah, but they might rebut me.”

Well, the rebutted Paul. Do you expect Satan just to lie down and roll over when you walk into Walmart?

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 17:19.

<sup>12</sup> See Acts 17:19-20.

So here are these people, similar to our culture today prizing, feeling in pleasures and intellect and money and prosperity and here is Paul being led to this hearing right up on Areopagus and he is going to make a stand right before them.

What would you say? How would you handle your defense?

Well, you will notice in verse 22 now Paul is going to give to us—verses 22 through 31—he is going to tell us who God really is.

So Paul stood, verse 22, “in the midst of Mars’ hill.”<sup>13</sup>

And you say, “I thought he was in Areopagus.”

Well, Areopagus was the Greek name and Mars’ hill was the Roman name. He is still at the same place. So he is standing there right in the midst of all this and he says, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.”<sup>14</sup>

Now we might read that and think that Paul was deriding them. He wasn’t. The word “superstitious” here means that they were very religiously devout. All he was saying to them was this. He says, “You men of Athens, what I perceive, I have only been in this city a short time, but what I perceive is that you in this city are very devout about your religion.”

Was that right? Yeah. It was devoutly wrong, but they were devout. Paul didn’t condemn them. He didn’t go after them. He is going to correct it. He acknowledged their devoutness. And I am sure that when he said—and I am reading into the text here—I am sure that all the judges and all the man and all the women that were there listening to him probably nodded their head in agreement.

So he opens his defense by proclaiming their sincerity of religious devotion. And then he declares that he is not proclaiming another god because he has found an altar to the God that he is proclaiming right there in the city. What is this altar?

Well, look at verse 23. He says, “I am surveying the city. I am out there looking at this mass of idolatry and I pass by and I was beholding your religious devotion...”

Now remember that religious devotion has stirred him by anger to start preaching the gospel. So he is saying, “I am looking all over this place and I am seeing your religious devotion and I find an altar with this inscription, ‘To the Unknown God.’”

Guess what? That is the God that Paul is preaching, the one they don’t know about.

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 17:22.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

So here he is before his defense. He says, “Here I am and I find this altar to the unknown God and so I am telling you. Here is an altar and when you worship at that altar you are worshipping ignorantly and I am here to tell you who this God is that you don’t know.”

Case closed.

He is not a setter forth of strange new gods. He is telling them about the one that they don’t what? They don’t know.

And, folks, in America today many, many, many people worship at an altar of an unknown god. Some people even call that Christianity, but it is a god of their imagination.

And what Paul is going to do here is he is going to tell them—look at verse 23 again—“Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship...”<sup>15</sup> Now they can’t say they don’t worship him not ignorantly because there is the altar saying that they are what? That they are ignorant.

“The one that you are ignorantly worshipping, him declare I unto you.”<sup>16</sup>

And what he is going to do in verses 24 down through verse 31 is he is going to clear up an ignorance and a fog that is in people’s minds about the one true God.

Now, folks that is what we want to do this morning.

Some of these truths will even appear strange even in Christian churches today. Let’s go through them.

In verses 24 and 25 he speaks of God as the Creator. So let’s begin building. There’s four truths about God as Creator here. Very simple for us to understand, but it might be disturbing to our own spirit that we have been worshipping God ignorantly.

Number one, it says in verse 24, “God that made the world and all things [what?].”<sup>17</sup>

All right, now let’s pause here. Do you realize that? Your Bible, the very first book in your Bible starts off this way. “In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth.”<sup>18</sup>

Do you believe that? Because, folks, remember, this is the God that Paul is preaching unto them and he is going to declare it so that they no longer will be what? Ignorant. Any philosophy, education, intellect, reasoning, that comes and says that God is not the Creator of the heavens and the earth, that he made the world and everything in it, every

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<sup>15</sup> Acts 17:23.

<sup>16</sup> See Acts 17:23.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 17:24.

<sup>18</sup> See Genesis 1:1.

ant, every microbe, every germ, all the way to the giant of trees and to man himself, God made all things. Anything else is ignorance.

Secondly, he says in verse 24, that he is Lord of heaven and earth and he doesn't dwell in temples made with hands.<sup>19</sup>

Folks, not only did he make all things and he is the Creator of all things, but, folks, he is the supreme king and ruler. And he doesn't dwell in buildings made with what? Human hands. Now he is going to keep bringing that up, human hands, two other times in this short discourse.

Now let's pause here. Folks, this building that we are meeting in is nothing in and of itself. What makes this building special is when the people of God meet together in this building. When that happens the Bible calls it a temple of the Lord. But the building itself does not hold God nor does it represent God.

Men, today think that God exists in their shrines. Buddhism, Islam every year Islamic people make a journey to where? To Mecca because that is the most holy place so that they can meet with God. It is a building. Who built the building? Men. God does not dwell in buildings made with human hands.

Do we understand that?

Folks, you can't get any more emphatic than that. God does not exist in altars. That took care of the over 30,000 altars that were there at the city of Athens, didn't it? God doesn't dwell in temples made with human hands. It takes care of statues. People will make statues of certain saints or bow down to an image of Mary. God doesn't dwell in buildings or things that were made with human what? Human hands.

You say, "Well, I am not worshipping it. I am just using it as an aid to my worship."

That is explicitly what God condemns in the 10 Commandments.

Saying that the Lord's Table and the bread and the wine and holding up a wafer and saying to people in Latin, "Behold your God." God does not dwell in things made by human what? Human hands. Isn't that simple? But men don't understand that.

Thirdly, not only did God make the world and all things therein, not only is he the supreme king and ruler and he doesn't dwell in buildings made with human hands, but in verse 25 he says, "God is not worshiped with men's what?"<sup>20</sup> The word "worship" there means serve.

Folks, do we understand that God is not made any better or any worse with the things by which we say we serve him?

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<sup>19</sup> See Acts 17:24.

<sup>20</sup> See Acts 17:25.

I meet people very frequently. Trouble will come in their life and they will something like this to me. They will say, 'Well, I don't understand why trouble is coming into my life. I mean I tithe.'

Do you think your tithing or your giving adds to or takes away from the very person of God? He is not served with human hands. Where is he served? Don't you remember? Here is Jesus talking to the woman at the well and the woman says unto him, "You know, in our culture they say, 'Well, you should serve here at Samaria.' But the Jews over in the Judean area, they say you ought to serve at Jerusalem. Where should we worship?"

And Jesus says, "Don't you understand? They that worship me must worship me where? In your heart of hearts."<sup>21</sup> And by the truth of the Word of God.

And, folks, you didn't make yourself, did you? God does this work inside of the human soul. And so God is not served with human hands and even us that are here that are Christians and have no reservations about our eternal destiny or the fact that we have born again by the grace of God. You and I need to sit down and seriously take that sentence about God deep into our own soul.

You say, "Well, if I don't serve him that way, how am I to serve him?"

In spirit, in truth, in love.

Fourthly, he says in verse 25, it says, "Neither is he [served] with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."<sup>22</sup>

Folks, do you think God needs you? There is a common theology that said when God created the world he did it because he was lonely. God had no need, no need at all. And you can't do anything to play on that need.

You know, I will have a need and maybe if you come to me and you say, "You know, pastor, how about if you do this for me, if I give you gold bullion."

And I would say, "Hey, ok."

But you could offer gold bullion to God and he would say, "What is that?"

Folks the reason for that is, verse 25, is that God gives to all life and breath and all things.

Who owns your life? Tell me. God does. And do you know what the problem is? You and I live in a culture where we think we are the source of life and that we are self independent and that the breath that we have in our lungs just comes through some

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<sup>21</sup> See John 4:24.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 17:25.

evolutionary process by which we kind of breathe in deep and breathe out and we are ok and you are ok and I am in control of my destiny.

That is ignorance. God gives to all life. Do you agree with that? That spider that is in your house, God gave life to that. That bug that is going to bother you in August when you are outside and swarming around your head, God gave life to that. God gave life to your enemies. He gave life to you. He gave life to your children.

And, folks, he gives to all things breath. There is a principle in medical—my wife told me. I have never forgotten this. She said, “If you ever take a test, a medical test, a health test, if one of the answers is airways, that is always the right answer,” because the primary thing that you have got to be concerned with somebody’s health is their what? Their breath. Are they breathing?

Where did that breath come from? God. And anything else that is there, verse 25. He gives to all life and breath and all things. You are not self originating. He gives you all things: your possessions, your influence, your poverty, your riches, your job, your family, your children, your family, friends, your church, where you live at, the geographical location, the nature, the nation in which you were born, it is all given to us by who? By God.

Isn’t that great?

So, folks, Paul isn’t backing off, is he? But he is going somewhere. His first thing is he said, “God made the world. He is the supreme king and ruler. He doesn’t dwell in things by human hands. He is not served with human hands. And everything that you have in life is a gift.”

Did you hear that? Everything you have in life is a gift. So quit patting yourself on the back.

Secondly, not only is he the Creator, he is the Sustainer. In verses 26 through 29 he says in verse 26 that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”<sup>23</sup>

Folks, there is not one group of human beings that are inherently superior to another group of human beings. Now, that goes against our culture, doesn’t it? We are Americans. Every human being, whatever stripe, education, intellect, nationality, ethnicity, whatever, language, all of those human beings came from one man that God created and that man’s name is Adam. Well, the Athenians thought that they were superior. But their great culture and their sincerity and their religious devotions...

And, folks, what he is saying here, verse 26, is that he formed the nations. He has taken or he has made all what of men? All nations of men. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God formed the Roman government? And he formed the United States of

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 17:26.

America? That he formed England, Germany, Argentina, China, Vietnam, Thailand, the islands? Who formed all those nations? God did. Not American ingenuity, not our, quote, great constitution, unquote. God formed our nation.

And, folks, not only did he form the nation, look at verse 26, but he determined the times before appointed. God formed the nation and every government and every entity and he determined the times of their power and their existence and their prosperity.

Do we realize there is a time limit on our nation? It is boudaried. When is it going to happen? It can happen at any time. Folks, you don't have to see things. Berlin wall came down in a day. You don't have to have certain things set into motion for our nation to crumble or our nation to change forms of government or for someone to come over and take our nation. All you need to do is for us to cross the boundary of which God has already predetermined for the existence of our nation and it is over.

Not only has he determined, verse 26, the times before appointed, but he has also determined, verse 26, the boundaries of their what? How come America went and took the whole continent. Why didn't they keep going? Why didn't we take Canada? They might have something to say about that. Because God is the one that determined the boundary.

Why did God say to that Iraqi nation, "This far, no more"? Why is that? That is God.

The boundaries of our habitation, the time frame of our prosperity came from? Who caused the stock market to collapse? God. Our power, our influence, our credibility, the formation of our nation, God is the one. Look at verse 26 again. He has "made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."<sup>24</sup> He did it.

Now why did he do it?

Folks, he did it—now please listen to me—he did it because it is the goodness of God that is designed to lead you to repentance.

Has he been good to our nation? Has he sent us prosperity? Are we sitting here without any threat? Not one time in this message have I ever thought, "I wonder if the police are going to come in." And what are we doing with this goodness? Are we repenting? God's goodness is showered on nations and people and ethnicities because it is goodness that is intended to lead them to repentance.

Folks, the false gods of this world, they rule by force and they rule by condemnation and they rule by saying, "You do this for me and I will do this for you." It is a merit system.

But not our God. He just gives. He is good. He is kind. He is benevolent. He pours out and opens his hand to all the world all the day long.

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 17:26.

This expression here is not only just come unto me all ye the ends of the earth. It is also I am giving to you out of my goodness.

God has designed his goodness to lead men to repentance. But we rob God of that glory, by attributing it to ourselves. It is amazing to me. Even God's own people can ask, they can beseech, they can say, "Please pray for this happen in my life." And then when it happens in their life they will say something like, "I did it or thank God you did it." And they won't give glory to God.

Because of that, verse 27, he did all this so that we would seek the Lord, so that we would find the Lord. The Lord desires for us to know him and to find him and not serve him ignorantly. He desires for his knowledge to go out through all the earth from one end of the globe to the other. He wants you to know him. He doesn't want you to serve him ignorantly because there are ramifications to that ignorant worship.

And because of that, verse 28, "in him we live, and move, and have our being."<sup>25</sup>

Folks, we live in the midst of God. We live in the midst of a God who providentially cares and sustains us. In his midst we exist. In his midst we are moved. We move. We move from one geographical area to the other under his care. In his midst we have our very being. We are not independent.

You say, "I want to be independent of God."

You will die. Your breath, your life, your movement, everything about yourself God, though he is transcendent, he is imminent, he is with us, he is not far from us because right in his midst we do everything that we do and he gives and he sustains by his providence.

But, folks, and lasting, verse 30 through 31 we need to understand that he is judge.

He says in verse 29, "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring..."<sup>26</sup>

You ought to never allow it to enter into your mind that God is like unto gold or silver or stone that is craven by human craft or by human imaginations. God is not that way. He is not served with human hands. He is not worshipped with human hands. Nothing that we can make with our hands is to be an aid in our worship to him. God is not like anything that we could form with our hands or imagine in our minds. He is not to be served that way.

Well, how is he to be served? With truth, with his revelation of himself because he is going to judge all the earth.

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<sup>25</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 17:29.



Folks, man is responsible for his actions. Man is responsible for his thoughts that are against God. Man is responsible for the motives that flow out of his own heart. Your heart one day is going to be laid open before God and the motives of your heart are going to be judged by him. That is frightening.

In verse 30 Paul says, “The times of this ignorance God [what?].”<sup>27</sup> Now that doesn’t mean like wink your eye. The word “winked at” is a King James rendering that means that he overlooked it, not that he passed it, but that he forebore it, he overlooked it because one day he was going to judge his Son for that ignorance.

So the times of this ignorance, of having an altar to an unknown God, of worshipping him with human hands, of worshipping him with our own imagination, all that time is over. It is done with. Those times of ignorance God winked at.

Today is the day in which God—look at verse 30—commands—next two words, “all men everywhere to repent.”<sup>28</sup>

And it is a command. God isn’t saying... he is not holding this out as an option. This is a command from the Lord God, supreme king and ruler, the one that made all things, the world and therein who is not served with human hands and gives you life and breath and all things that has determined the boundaries of nations and their prosperities and their powers and the extent of their geographical expansion, in the midst of this, God in whom you live and move and have your being, this God now by his goodness is commanding you to repent because in his goodness he sent his Son.

Isn’t that a graciousness? He sent his only begotten Son. In other words, folks, God commands you to repent and basically what that means is you need to change how you believe and how you live. You are not to live epicurean. You are not to live stoically. You are not to live by just having, you know, your own individualistic, devout, sincere religion. You are not to live by being Jewish. You are to live by the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ by which you may be saved. And God commands this No more ignorance is allowed. God commands all men everywhere to repent and he has done this, verse 31, because there is coming a day.

Folks, there is coming a day where the whole world is going to be judged. Did you hear that? Christian, did you hear that? You are going to be judged, too. The whole world will be judged. Now for a believer they will not be judged unto condemnation. For lost people that judgment will be unto eternal death.

And he says, verse 31, “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world.”<sup>29</sup> How? In righteousness.

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<sup>27</sup> Acts 17:30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 17:31.

Do you know God won't be wrong? You can go down to the courtrooms in our city of Richmond. You can go into the courtrooms of Washington, DC. You can enter into the Supreme Court of the land. You can go into the federal districts and talk to federal judges and all of them are corrupt. This isn't a thing on them. It is people. There is only one judge that is absolutely right. And it is Jesus Christ.

Do you think you will get what is due coming to you?

You say, "Well, I just want God to judge so God would give that person what is due to him."

Yeah, and it is going to be due to you, too.

And God has commanded us to repent because he knows about that day in which he is going to judge the world in righteousness. So now is the time. No more ignorance. Repent in how you believe and live. Come to Christ. That is where Paul is heading.

And, folks, here is the fascinating thing. Look at verse 31. "Because he..."<sup>30</sup> that is God, "hath appointed a day, in the which he,"<sup>31</sup> God, "will judge the world in righteousness by [a what?]"<sup>32</sup> A man. Isn't that amazing? God is going to judge the world by who? Guess where he is heading? He is heading to Jesus Christ.

And that man has been given a certainty that he will be the judge through whom God will judge. And the certainty of his judgment is because—look at verse 31 again, last phrase—"he [God] hath given assurance unto all men, in that he [God] hath raised [that man] from the [what?]"<sup>33</sup> From the dead.

And that is what we are supposed to be celebrating next Lord's Day. The certainty of that day of judgment is because of the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now at that point he was interrupted. I wish he had gone on. I wish they hadn't interrupted. I wanted to see how he was going to pull the net. But in verse 32 he was interrupted between declaring who this true God is because when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, they what? The word "mock" means they made malicious fun at him.

Do you like to be laughed at? Paul was interrupted with this malicious mocking.

And others said, "Well, you know, this is educationally enriching and nice and curious and we will hear from you again about this matter."

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

But guess what? The courtroom proceeding is done. He didn't send forth a strange new god. And he did declare to them the unknown God, the one that they ignorantly worshiped.

And, folks, here is what is amazing. This is amazing. In verse 19 they took him. They took him. In verse 33 who departed? Paul walked out. But in that moment there were people there in that courtroom who heard what Paul said. And they got saved.

Are you shocked? What would you do if you heard of one of our supreme court justices getting saved at a hearing?

And one of those men were Dionysius. And, folks, that phrase that describes him is a description declaring that he was one of the judges.

And this is amazing. There was a woman there. She must have been highly educated which was unusual in that day, a woman of stature. And she got converted.

And I love the last three words, "others with them."<sup>34</sup>

How would you know they got really converted? Look at verse 34. You see the verb? "Certain men clave unto him, and believed."<sup>35</sup>

Folks, you can always tell a genuine believer because it results in a cleaving, a uniting to the one that is proclaiming the truth of God. And when the body of cleaving together people come together, we call that a church to the glory of God.

God commands us to repent, to put your faith and trust not in human hands and not in human imaginations, but in a living Christ who died on the old rugged tree. God placed on him the sin of all mankind. He died and was buried and he rose again on the third day so that you might be declared righteous in the sight of God. He took your penalty if you will repent and believe today and call on the name of the Lord to save you.

And for those of us that are here that are saved, now you know how to preach to an American culture. You are no longer ignorant. You have got to teach them who the truth God is and head to the God man Jesus Christ.

Let's stand with our heads bowed and our eyes closed.

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<sup>34</sup> Acts 17:34.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.