

The Only True God You Can Know¹

Acts 17:22-34

May 8, 2022

Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babblers want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. **Acts 17:18**

In this message, which is similar to his sermon at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17), Paul shared four basic truths about God.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD: HE IS CREATOR (v. 24). Every thinking person asks, "Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?" Science attempts to answer the first question, and philosophy wrestles with the second; but only the Christian faith has a satisfactory answer to all three. The Epicureans, who were atheists, said that all was matter and matter always was. The Stoics said that everything was God, "the Spirit of the Universe." God did not create anything; He only organized matter and impressed on it some "law and order."

But Paul boldly affirmed, "In the beginning, God!" God made the world and everything in it, and He is Lord of all that He has made. He is not a distant God, divorced from His creation; nor is He an imprisoned God, locked in creation. He is too great to be housed in man-made temples (1 Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1-2; Acts 7:48-50), but He is not too great to be concerned about man's needs (Acts 17:25). We wonder how the Council members reacted to Paul's statement about temples, for right there on the Acropolis were several shrines dedicated to Athena.

¹ *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

Genesis 1:1

⁶ *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*

Psalms 33:6

²⁸ *Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.*

Isaiah 40:28

¹² *He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, And has stretched out the heavens at His discretion.*

Jeremiah 10:12

THE GOODNESS OF GOD; HE IS PROVIDER (v. 25). Men may pride themselves in serving God, but it is God who serves man. If God is God, then He is self-sufficient and needs nothing that man can supply. Not only do the temples not contain God, but the services in the temples add nothing to God! In two brief statements, Paul completely wiped out the entire religious system of Greece!

It is God who gives to us what we need: "life, and breath, and all things." God is the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). He gave us life and He sustains that life by His goodness (Matt. 5:45). It is the goodness of God that should lead men to repentance (Rom. 2:4). But instead of worshiping the Creator and glorifying Him, men worship His creation and glorify themselves (Rom. 1:18-25).

¹⁷ *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

James 1:17

⁴⁵ *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Matthew 5:45

⁴ *Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*

Romans 2:4

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 1:18-25

¹ Outline taken from Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - New Testament, Volume 1.

THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD: HE IS RULER (vv. 26-29). The gods of the Greeks were distant beings who had no concern for the problems and needs of men. But the God of Creation is also the God of history and geography! He created mankind "from one man" (Acts 17:26, NIV) so that all nations are made of the same stuff and have the same blood. The Greeks felt that they were a special race, different from other nations; but Paul affirmed otherwise. Even their precious land that they revered came as a gift from God. It is not the power of man, but the government of God, that determines the rise and fall of nations (Dan. 4:35).

God is not a distant deity; "He [is] not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). Therefore, men ought to seek God and come to know Him in truth. Here Paul quoted from the poet Epimenides: "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." Then he added a quotation from two poets, Aratus and Cleanthes, "For we are also His offspring." Paul was not saying that all people on earth are the spiritual children of God, for sinners become God's children only by faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:11-13). Rather, he was affirming the "Fatherhood of God" in a *natural* sense, for man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). In this sense, Adam was a "son of God" (Luke 3:38).

This led to Paul's logical conclusion: God made us in His image, so it is foolish for us to make gods in our own image! Greek religion was nothing but the manufacture and worship of gods who were patterned after men and who acted like men. Paul not only showed the folly of temples and the temple rituals, but also the folly of all idolatry.

²⁶ *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,* **Acts 17:26**

³⁵ *All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"* **Daniel 4:35**

²⁰ *Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. ²¹ And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding.* **Daniel 2:20-21**

¹¹ *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* **John 1:11-13**

THE GRACE OF GOD: HE IS SAVIOR (vv. 30-34). As he brought his message to a close, Paul summarized the clear evidences of God's grace. For centuries, God was patient with man's sin and ignorance (see Acts 14:16; Rom. 3:25). This does not mean that men were not guilty (Rom. 1:19-20), but only that God held back divine wrath. In due time, God sent a Savior, and now He commands all men to repent of their foolish ways. This Savior was killed and then raised from the dead, and one day, He will return to judge the world. The proof that He will judge is that He was raised from the dead.

¹⁶ *who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.* **Acts 14:16**

²⁵ *whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,* **Romans 3:25**

There were three different responses to the message. Some laughed and mocked and did not take Paul's message seriously. Others were interested but wanted to hear more. A small group accepted what Paul preached, believed on Jesus Christ, and were saved. We wonder if the others who postponed their decision eventually trusted Christ. We hope they did.

When you contrast the seeming meager results in Athens with the great harvests in Thessalonica and Berea, you are tempted to conclude that Paul's ministry there was a dismal failure. If you do, you might find yourself drawing a hasty and erroneous conclusion. Paul was not told to leave, so we assume he lingered in Athens and continued to minister to both believers and unbelievers. Proud, sophisticated, wise Athens would not take easily to Paul's humbling message of the Gospel, especially when he summarized all of Greek history in the phrase "the times of this ignorance." The soil here was not deep and it contained many weeds, but there was a small harvest.

And, after all, one soul is worth the whole world!

We still need witnesses who will invade the "halls of academe" and present Christ to people who are wise in this world but ignorant of the true wisdom of the world to come. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called" (1 Cor. 1:26); but some *are* called, and God may use you to call them.

Take the Gospel to your "Athens."

Prayer Focus:

- **Is God your Creator, Savior, Provider and Ruler?**
- **Are you taking the Gospel to your sphere of influence?**