



Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

GRACE ORIENTED • CHRIST CENTERED

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The Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit sends the Church with the Gospel **Acts 17.16-34 The Gospel Takes on All Worldviews**

INTRODUCTION: “Redemptive Analogies”¹

About 30 years ago, there was a missionary to a remote part of the world named Don Richardson. He worked with island tribes that were known to be cruel to each other. This cruelty took on the form of cannibalism. One tribe would show their mastery over another tribe by eating a few of their best warriors.

Eventually, the fighting would halt and to make peace, the chief of one tribe would give his eldest son to the other tribe as a peace offering. This son would now belong to the chief of the other tribe. This son was forced to switch tribes, switch families, change everything ... and become part of the other tribe.

The son given over to the enemy ... was known as the Peace Child.

And Don Richardson was able to use the tradition of the Peace Child to explain to these tribal people how God in heaven, the Great Chief, gave over His first-born son to His enemies, made up of all the tribes of the whole world, in order to bring peace between God and man.

He told them that Jesus Christ was the original Peace Child.

Now, there's much more to the story than that, and I would encourage you to read the book, Peace Child, by Don Richardson, to get the whole picture.

But Don Richardson coined the term, “*redemptive analogies*,” to explain that in every single nation, tribe, culture, and language there were things that reminded us of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if we were to learn the language and culture, we would eventually find these things, like the Peace Child, that would serve as a bridge to share the Gospel with that culture.

And that had a dramatic effect on world missions! Now missionaries started immersing themselves in the culture, becoming part of the culture, in order to discover the stories and traditions that would give them the opportunity to tell the

¹ Don Richardson has written several books about putting redemptive analogies into action. Peace Child and Eternity in their Hearts are two of the most well known.

people of these cultures about Christ in a way they could easily understand.

Now in July, Potomac Hills is going to send a missions team of 15 people to the Eastern Cherokee Nation in North Carolina. [And by the way, we have to raise about \$6,400 to cover the entire team and all the administrative and logistics costs, so I want to encourage you to support those going.]

But we are having to learn about the Cherokee Nation before we go. Now the Cherokee Nation has somewhat of a sad history. In 1838, the United States government forced them to move from the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee to Oklahoma. They were forced to march west by the Army under General Winfield Scott and thousands died along the way. It is known as “The Trail of Tears.”

But some of the Cherokee refused to go and were known as fugitives. One of them was named Tsali. He and his family escaped from the soldiers and were on the run from the Army. The military sent so many soldiers after them that the Cherokee who had been allowed to stay lived in fear that they too would be forced to make the march west.

Eventually Tsali surrendered and was executed. The Federal troops left the North Carolina Mountains and allowed some of the Cherokee to remain in their ancient homeland. Today Tsali is revered as a legend and inspiration to the Cherokee on the belief that he had turned himself in and sacrificed his own life in order that some of his people might live.

The story of Tsali is a natural **redemptive analogy**.

And today there are missionaries immersing themselves in the Cherokee culture so that they might win the right to use this redemptive analogy of Tsali to tell them about another who sacrificed his own life so his people might live.

Two cultures – one on an island in the Pacific, another in the mountains of North Carolina. But both cultures have redemptive analogies, natural bridges to the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, while the term “redemptive analogies” might have been new to us, it was not a new concept. In fact, the concept of finding similarities in the culture goes as far back as the Apostle Paul, who once wrote, **1 Corinthians 9:20-23**, *“When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. [21] When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. [22] When I am with those who are oppressed, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. **Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ.**”*

[23] *I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings.*”

The Apostle Paul says, *“I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ.”*

In The Message, that verse is translated like so, *“I kept my bearings in Christ—but **I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view.** I’ve become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life.”* (The Message)

And here in Acts 17 we get to see the Apostle Paul put the concept of redemptive analogies into practice in the ancient Greek city of Athens.

Now, if you remember from a few weeks ago, Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke, our Gospel quartet, had moved across Asia Minor, both led and restrained by the Holy Spirit. Finally, from the coast of Troas, the winds carried them to Samothrace to Neapolis to Philippi, where they were privileged to meet *the man from Macedonia*, who, as it turned out, was a woman named Lydia.

And she heard the Gospel, the Lord opened her heart, and she came to Christ, along with her entire household. And it was experiences like that which caused Paul to write in **Romans 1:16**, *“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles.”* And so the Gospel came to Europe for the first time. And the first flag planted in Roman territory was planted in the heart of a woman named Lydia. And despite persecution and hardship, God was graciously working. Paul and Silas moved on to Thessalonica and Berea and in those places, people were very receptive to their message and many came to the saving knowledge of Christ through the preaching of the Word.



But now the scene changes, the people are different, and the Apostle Paul is thrust into a new and different situation, where people are happy to talk to him, as long as it doesn't get too personal.

You see, it's commonly held today that it's fine to be a Christian as long as you don't take it too seriously. "Christianity has produced some of the world's greatest minds. Some of her doctrines are fascinating for intellectual exercise. But to take them seriously — to base one's life on them? Surely you can't be serious!"

That not only describes the attitudes we commonly face in the post-modern, post-Christian, American culture, but that's exactly what the church has historically encountered and that's exactly what the Apostle Paul faced in Athens.

The Apostle Paul, one of the most passionate and fiery Christians who ever lived, collided head-on with the dispassionate intellectualism of Athens.

The story of "Paul versus Athens" is a fascinating one, and is found right here in Acts 17. Let's see what happens. Turn with me to Acts 17 ...

Acts 17:16-34, *"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. [17] He went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.*

[18] He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and His resurrection, they said, "This babbler has picked up some strange ideas." Others said, "He's pushing some foreign religion."

[19] Then they took him to the Council of Philosophers. "Come and tell us more about this new religion," they said. [20] "You are saying some rather startling things, and we want to know what it's all about." [21] (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.) [22] So Paul, standing before the Council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious, [23] for as I was walking along I saw your many altars. And one of them had this inscription on it—'To an Unknown God.' You have been worshiping Him without knowing who He is, and now I wish to tell you about Him.

*[24] "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't live in man-made temples, [25] and human hands can't serve His needs—for He has no needs. He Himself gives life and breath to everything, and He satisfies every need there is. [26] From one man He created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand which should rise and fall, and He determined their boundaries. [27] **"His purpose in all of this was that the nations should seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him—though He is not far from any one of us.** [28] For in Him we live and move and exist. As one of your own poets says, 'We are his offspring.' [29]*

*And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. [30] God overlooked people's former ignorance about these things, but now **He commands everyone everywhere to turn away from idols and turn to Him.** [31] **For He has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising Him from the dead.**"*

[32] When they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of a person who had been dead, some laughed, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later." [33] That ended Paul's discussion with them, [34] but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Council, a woman named Damaris, and others."

Now, before we get too far into the text, we have to pause for a moment and take a look at the background of this unique place that is the city of Athens.

BACKGROUND: *The Glory of Athens*²

Paul left Berea and made the 200-mile trip down to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy behind. He was alone in the glorious Athens of Socrates, his brilliant student Plato, and Plato's student Aristotle, perhaps the most influential philosopher of all time. It was the home of Epicurus, founder of the Epicureans, and it was the home of Zeno, founder of the Stoics, the two dominant philosophies of the day.

By Paul's day, Corinth has replaced Athens as the political and commercial center of Greece. And yet Paul found the city's glory and prestige intact. Athens was still the cultural and intellectual center of the world (much like Oxford in the 19th Century, Boston for much of the 20th Century, and as many think Manila and Bombay will be for the 21st Century), and scholars from all over the known world made Athens home.

Even though the Romans conquered Athens in 146 B.C. Athens retained her supremacy, because the Romans loved everything Greek and so didn't change her status as a free city. Despite all her glory, Athens was empty because she was living on the memories of the past. In philosophy she simply repeated the echoes of men long gone. Her art was no longer a natural overflow of wisdom and beauty but a lingering reflex of what once was. It was to such a city that the apostle came — proud, glorious to the eye, but intellectually, artistically, and spiritually dead.

They simply were not ready for the Apostle Paul.

We start with ...

v. 16-21: RECOGNIZING WHO THEY ARE³

2 The background and exposition of the text is adapted from *Preaching the Word: Acts* by R. Kent Hughes, pages 229-236; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13-28* by John MacArthur, pages 127-142; and *Acts: An Expository Commentary* by James Montgomery Boice, pages 293-301.

We pick up the story in verse 16, *“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city.”*

The apostle stared long and hard at what he saw, for the city was truly “full of idols.” One pagan writer, visiting Athens fifty years after Paul, said it was easier to meet a god or goddess on the main street of Athens than to meet a man. This was statistically true because the population was about 10,000 people, but there were 30,000 statues of gods and goddesses. The streets were lined with idols of false deities, framed by the architectural magnificence of the Parthenon and the Acropolis. There was so much white marble it was all dazzling to the eye.

No doubt Paul appreciated much of the city’s beauty, being a man of culture. Nevertheless, **“he was deeply troubled.”** The Greek literally means he was angry about a lie. As a Jew, he would have been disturbed, and as a Christian apostle he was even more enraged! Every idol demonstrated the Athenians’ hunger for God, but every idol also testified to their spiritual emptiness.

Ignorant of the true God, the Athenians were lost!

Paul felt desperate concern for the spiritual need before his eyes. As had happened with the prophet Jeremiah, an urge to speak came like a burning fire, and the apostle couldn’t hold it in any longer. As believers, our hearts should ache and our eyes blur at what we see around us — ignorant souls denying the one true God and giving allegiance to false deities. If we experience anger or distress at spiritual denial, then we either haven’t truly been redeemed by Jesus Christ or we’ve become apathetic to the things of God.

Paul was neither indifferent nor detached, so he jumped right in, verse 17, *“He went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there. [18] He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.”*

Paul began dialoguing with anyone who would talk, and he found three groups of hearers — first, he talked to those who were religious, *“the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles”*, who he talked to on the Sabbath in the synagogue.

Next he talked to the average, ordinary folk’s busy going about their daily routines in the marketplace.

And last, but most significantly, he took on the intellectual philosopher-types called *“the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.”*

These two groups represented the competing philosophies of the day.

The Epicureans believed that everything happens by chance, and death is the end — extinction with no afterlife. They believed there are gods, but those gods

3 Information on the Athenian intellectual society comes from Therefore Stand by Wilbur Smith, a classic work on apologetics and theology. F. F. Bruce quote comes from his commentary, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts, page 351.

have nothing to do with the world. They were practical agnostics who believed that the chief end of man is to gain the maximum amount of pleasure and the minimum amount of pain ... and that a simple lifestyle is the least painful and the most pleasurable. They were the popular hedonists of their day, advertising their philosophy of “you only go around once, so enjoy it as much as you can.”

The Stoics were pantheists, believing that everything is god and that whatever happened to them was their destiny. Consequently, they sought to live with apathy and detachment — fatalistic resignation. They believed that the only thing you had any control over was yourself, and so self-mastery was the greatest possible virtue. And they taught that self-mastery came from being indifferent to both pleasure and pain, striving to reach a place where one feels nothing. They were the New Agers of their day, trying to reach a higher plane through self-mastery, which ultimately was nothing more than self-worship.

Together, these two philosophies represented the popular pagan alternatives for dealing with the plight of humanity apart from Christ.

Epicureans? Simple hedonists – living for self-gratification.

Stoics? Detached observers – living for self-control.

Both were highly intellectual, but being philosophies that denied God, both lacked **several critical things**; they had **no truth**, they **had no hope**, and for the average person, they offered **no guidance** for the problems of everyday life.

If you suffered a great loss, the Stoics said, “Suck it up. Be tough. Don’t let it bother you.” To which the Epicureans simply replied, “Since there’s nothing you can do about it, don’t worry – be happy. In fact, getting drunk sounds like a pretty good idea about now.”

The great commentator, F. F. Bruce, wrote about them that “Stoicism and Epicureanism represent alternate attempts in pre-Christian paganism to come to terms with the uncertainty and hardship of life, and post-Christian paganism in our day hasn’t been able to devise anything appreciably better.”

How would they respond to the gospel Paul preached?

We pick it up in the last part of verse 18, “*When he told them about Jesus and His resurrection, they said, "This **babbler** has picked up some strange ideas." Others said, "He's pushing some foreign religion."*

They wrapped their response with clever ironic sarcasm. The word translated “babbler” is literally “seedpicker.” Originally used to describe birds picking up seeds and grain, over the years the word came to mean one who peddled others’ ideas as original without really understanding them — a plagiarist who couldn’t stop talking, but was unable to thoroughly explain his borrowed ideas! This was a person who lacked understanding but liked to sound profound, not unlike the experts you find on cable news shows.

This was undoubtedly a very “in” word with this crowd of intellectuals, calling an outsider an ignorant “babblers.”

In Acts 17:19-21 Luke gives his evaluation of the Athenians, “*Then they took him to the Council of Philosophers. “Come and tell us more about this new religion,” they said. [20] “You are saying some rather startling things, and we want to know what it's all about.” [21] (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)*”

In fact, it was the intellectual philosophers who were the babblers!

The Athenian University was the home of dilettantism, which means that they were amateurs who **pretend** to have knowledge. They exalted the cool, cultivated, critical intellect, which had tried all things and found all things wanting; and in it there were few hearers and no open door for new teaching.

The Athenian mind-set was always in pursuit of the new, the brilliant, the dazzling, the sensational, whatever the whims of the hour happened to be. So now the crowd brought Paul before the Areopagus — the Council of Ares (or as the Latin has it, Mars). If the speech was given at Mars Hill, as many believe, then before Paul lay the Theseum, the classic Doric temple. On his right was the upper city — with the Acropolis and the matchless Parthenon. Around him loomed thousands of marble statues and altars in gold, silver, and bronze. Paul stood amidst the symbols of departed greatness, with the gods of Greece staring down at him. Immediately before him sat the most exclusive philosophical review board in the world!

What an intellectual face-off! On one side stood Paul — divinely empowered, a man who had staked everything he had on his message.

On the other side stood the Areopagus — sophisticated but indifferent.

Paul stood before this intimidating group of powerful philosophers absolutely alone! What would the seedpicker say? Paul was about to give what has been rightly called “a masterpiece of communication.”

In one of the best apologetic messages ever given, the Apostle Paul takes on the Ivy League of the 1st Century. He starts by ...

v. 22-23: RECOGNIZING THAT GOD IS

Paul begins his message in verse 22, “*So Paul, standing before the Council, addressed them as follows: “Men of Athens, I notice that **you** are very religious, [23] for as I was walking along I saw your many altars. And one of them had this inscription on it—‘To an Unknown God.’ You have been worshiping Him without knowing who He is, and now I wish to tell you about Him.” [ESV— “I proclaim to you.”]*”

Paul’s approach was brilliant. As courteous and conciliatory as possible, he

complimented them on being “*very religious.*” Paul was undoubtedly eager to protest their idolatry and point them to the truth, but he restrained himself and gave a genuine compliment first. He met them where they were. “In my stroll around your famous city I found an altar to an unknown god. Let me tell you about the one who you are worshipping.” The redemptive analogy he uses is their altar inscribed to the unknown God. You have an unknown God? Well, let me tell make Him known! Paul establishes common ground.

His message also made brilliant application, for he pointed directly to the problem. The word translated “unknown” is the root from which we get **agnosticism**, which means “without knowledge.”

The Athenians were supposed to know everything, and they thought they did ... almost. But on the most **important** truth they came up short — they did **not** know God. Paul didn’t say this — they did. One of their altars was inscribed - “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD”. Many of them probably grasped the apostle’s irony.

Having established the bridge, Paul now began giving the Athenians doses of spiritual truth — first about God and then about themselves.

Truth about God always helps us understand ourselves.

So he moves on to ...

v. 24-29: **RECOGNIZING WHO GOD IS** ⁴

We pick up Paul’s message in verse 24, *“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn’t live in man-made temples, [25] and human hands can’t serve His needs—for He has no needs. He Himself gives life and breath to everything, and He satisfies every need there is.*

Having established that God exists and can be known by men, Paul simply starts to introduce his audience to Him. He begins by saying that the fundamental truth about God is that he is ...

- **The Creator:** *“He is the God who made the world and everything in it.”*

That may not sound earth-shaking to us, but it challenged their whole theology. The Stoics were pantheists who believed that everything was God and He couldn’t have created himself and the Epicureans who as practical atheists believed that matter was eternal and had no creator. Paul’s declaration denied the premises of both groups.

Second, Paul tells them that this God is ...

- **The Giver Of Life:** *“He Himself gives life and breath to everything”*

This drove the truth home even further, for it directly attacked the Epicureans’ belief that God was absent and the Stoics’ belief that he was in

⁴ For the revelation of God in nature (“Natural Revelation”) go to Romans 1:18-20. For the revelation of God in man’s conscience (“The Moral Law”), go to Romans 2:14–15.

everything. As the giver of life, God is actively here, but He is not contained in creation.

Third, Paul tells them that God is ...

- **The Ruler:** *“Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't live in man-made temples,”*

This God doesn't live in man-made temples, even spectacular wonder-of-the-world Greek structures like the Acropolis, only a few hundred yards from where they were talking.

And because God created them, He is the Lord, and their rightful ruler. There are too many passages of Scripture that describe the sovereignty of God, but one of the most interesting comes from the lips of a pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, **Daniel 4:34-35**, *“After this time had passed, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven. My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever. His rule is everlasting, and his kingdom is eternal. All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He has the power to do as he pleases among the angels of heaven and with those who live on earth. No one can stop him or challenge him, saying, 'What do you mean by doing these things?'"*

And in case they didn't get the point, he tells them in verse 26 that *“From one man He created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand which should rise and fall, and He determined their boundaries.”*

As Sovereign Lord, God ordains their times and controls their destinies. This was a blow to the national pride of the Greeks, who coined the term “barbarian” to refer to non-Greeks. Paul exposes this pride, by telling them that God made all men equal, both by being His creation, and by living under His control, whether they are aware of it or not.

Practically, Paul was saying that they were not living in Athens as a result of some cosmic accident. Rather, God had structured their lives in order to attract them to Him, verse 27, ***“His purpose in all of this was that the nations should seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him—though He is not far from any one of us.”***

Great truths about God led to the truth about themselves: they were specially created by God, and he was seeking a personal relationship with them.

Hebrews 11:6, *“So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that there is a God and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him.”*

God's providential activity as creator, ruler, and giver of life should move these men (and all men and women) to **seek** Him. Reason should send them from the greatest effect (the world in which they live) back to the first cause — God. In

all that He has done in creating and sustaining the universe, God has revealed Himself to mankind. Such self-disclosure should encourage men to “*seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him.*” The natural revelation of God in the human conscience and the physical world leaves all men without excuse since “*He is not far from any one of us.*” Even those who never heard the gospel are still accountable to God for failing to respond to His natural revelation.

The apostle explained that as God’s creatures, the Athenians had intrinsic dignity, verse 28, “*For in Him we live and move and exist. As one of your own poets says, 'We are his offspring.'*”

Paul was a master communicator! He quoted a couple of their own poets in order to keep their interest. The first part, “*For in him we live and move and exist,*” is from the work of Epimenides, while the second line, “*We are his offspring,*” is from the writings of Aratus. Paul used these poets as redemptive analogies to illustrate the universal revelation of God as creator, ruler, and giver of life. While Paul could have easily documented these truths from the pages of the Old Testament, He chose instead to use redemptive analogies, illustrations familiar to his pagan audience, who would have been unfamiliar with the Scriptures.

And so he says, therefore, despite your thousands of idols, and gold engraved altars, they don’t really do God justice, verse 29, “*And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.*”

Paul is telling them that if God created man, if God rules over man, if God gives man life, then God must be more than a man-made idol. And he used quotes from their own poets to highlight the absurdity of idolatry. His point was that as creatures of intrinsic dignity, having been created by God, men ought to refrain from false worship. Since we are made in the image of God, it is insulting to God and degrading to us to make an idol of Him.

Paul could have spoken about the gross immorality of the Athenians, but he doesn’t. He could have spoken about the intellectual arrogance of the philosophers, but he doesn’t. There was a sense that in these areas, they simply didn’t know better. But in the area of natural revelation, recognizing God in and through His creation, they had no excuse.

However, just to recognize that God exists, and even understand who He is, will not lead to a saving knowledge of Him. That comes only from an understanding of special revelation.

And so Paul concludes his message by presenting to his audience God’s special revelation in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Because what’s most important is ...

v. 30-31: RECOGNIZING WHAT GOD HAS DONE

Paul ends his message by letting them know in no uncertain terms that what God has done demands a personal response, verse 30, *“God overlooked people's former ignorance about these things, but now He commands everyone everywhere to turn away from idols and turn to Him. [31] For He has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising Him from the dead.”*

The coming of Christ brought about a change in God's dealing with humanity. In the past, *“God overlooked people's former ignorance about these things,”* that is, He didn't always intervene with judgment against the nations who did not know Him. *“But now He commands everyone everywhere to turn away from idols and turn to Him.”*

Natural revelation is insufficient to save, and merely serves to draw men to God. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, as we saw in **Acts 4:12**, *“There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.”*

And so everyone everywhere is to repent. Repent of what? Idolatry.

If men set anything above God as the object of their time, thought, energy, or life, they are worshiping the work of their hands and are thereby degrading God and themselves. They must repent because judgment is coming! We are not moving toward extinction (as the Epicureans thought), nor toward absorption in the cosmos (as the Stoics supposed). But we are moving toward divine judgment. Moreover, our Judge is a resurrected man.

The intellectual philosophers did not like this at all. Some mocked Paul. Others delayed, “perhaps tomorrow.” But some people did respond.

And it's important ...

v. 32-34: RECOGNIZING HOW THEY (AND WE) RESPOND

Look at verse 32, *“When they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of a person who had been dead, some laughed, but others said, “We want to hear more about this later.” [33] That ended Paul's discussion with them, [34] but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Council, a woman named Damaris, and others.”*

This confronting call for decision was not what these philosophical pretenders were looking for. One famous philosopher comments, “This admirable account plainly shows how far [Greek] tolerance goes and where the patience of the intellectual ends. They all listen to you, calmly and smilingly, and at times they encourage you, saying: “That is strange!” or, “He has brains!” or, “That is suggestive!” or, “How fine!” or, “Pity that a thing so beautiful should not be true!”

or, “This makes one think!” But as soon as you speak to them of resurrection and life after death, they lose their patience and cut short their remarks and exclaim, “Enough of this! We will talk about this another day!”

Everything is fine as long as we remain theoretical, but when we call for action, men begin to shift their posture and look at their watches. Seeing their accountability to the true God makes many people uncomfortable.

Paul’s sermon had three results — mockery, delay, and belief. The first two responses show that many did not care about truth. Some said, “Seedpicker . . . what a waste of time!” When the discussion went beyond fun and games, they cut it off. Others said, “We want to hear you again,” but they cared little whether they actually did or did not, and they never did hear him again. The opening verse of Acts 18 tells us, “*After this, Paul left Athens.*” Apparently most rejected the apostle’s message and the Savior he proclaimed.

But, Praise God, some truly believed and came to faith. Despite the prevalence of mockery and rejection that day, a man and a woman gave their lives to Jesus Christ. The man’s name was Dionysius, and he was one of the elite — a member of the Areopagus. The woman was called Damaris. We know nothing else about them, but we do know they listened to Paul’s words. They not only recognized God’s existence and who He is but also took the final step and listened to what He said to them through His messenger.

Because of that, they alone came to know the “unknown God.”

If we are believers, if we truly know Christ, we must never hear or read God’s Word in a detached manner. We must pay attention to God with all our being. We must never give way to an intellectual detachment when it comes to spiritual things. We must always respond. When truth comes, we must respond to it, interact with it and appropriate it for ourselves. One of the great sins of the church today is the dispassionate hearing of God’s Word. Because of this, there are many who are spiritually ill, unable to comprehend truths they once held. Only God can deliver his children from such apathy!

In this age of liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, pragmatism, psychology, emotionalism, experientialism, and man-centered theology, the church desperately needs a proper perspective of God.

To the unbelieving world, rife with skepticism, supernaturalism and anti-supernaturalism, rationalism, mysticism, and the hopeless despair each produces, the Christian offers the only message of hope.

Man is not a cosmic accident, a personal being trapped in an impersonal universe. There is a God, who is both the creator of the universe and its sovereign ruler. Not only does He exist, but He is also knowable and has revealed Himself to man. God created men to know Him and through that knowledge to glorify Him.

Man's intimate knowledge of God was lost in the Fall but is restored through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Sin is forgiven, and alienated people are reconciled to God, all through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this was "*proved to everyone ... by raising Him from the dead.*"

Easter morning, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, demonstrated in an undeniable way, God's approval of Him, and qualified Him as judge. There are no excuses now—the proof of the Word of the Lord is in. Sinners will be judged by what they do with that truth. Jesus Christ is the judge, and His judgment of you and me will be based upon how we respond to the truth God furnished ... "*by raising Him from the dead.*"

Will you mock Christ? Will you merely put Him off to tomorrow? Or will you respond to Him in faith? This is, after all, not what the world expects to hear. It is not a message they will hear anywhere else. It is powerful, but not always popular. And as Paul found out, it can lead to uproar and riot, mockery and doubt.

But out of that darkness, out of that confusion, out of that depravity, out of that idolatry, and out of that ignorance, comes the shining light of the Gospel, leading men and women who, **somehow**, received that Gospel by faith and whose lives would be forever changed. Such is the grace of Christ received by faith. The only function of faith is to respond to grace. Faith takes what grace offers. No matter who you are or what you have done.

Because it's all of **Grace** from beginning to end, and it's all of Grace because it's all of Christ, and God "*proved to everyone ... by raising Him from the dead.*" And all who believe it said, "Amen."