

Acts 103

True Repentance

Acts 17:28-34

April 22, 2026

Dr. Andy Woods

Let us take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 17:28.

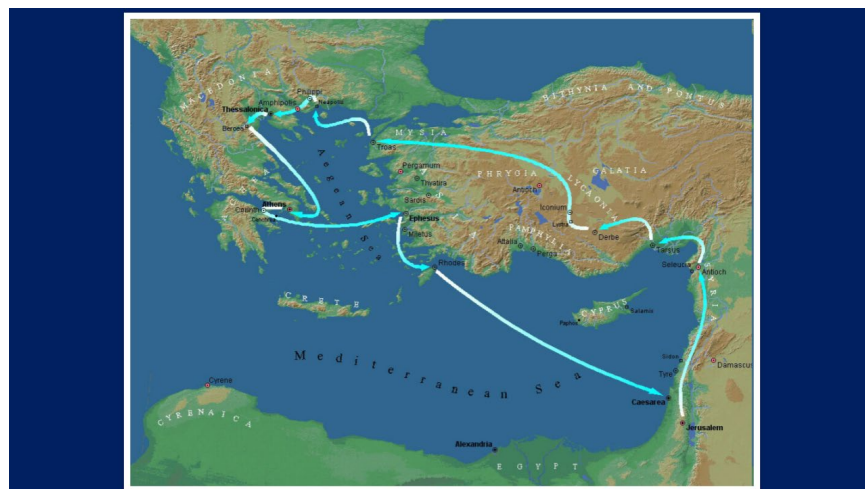
Structure (Acts 1:8)

- Jerusalem (Acts 1–7)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12)
- **Remotest part of the earth (Acts 13–28)**
 - 1st missionary journey (Acts 13–14)
 - Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-35)
 - **2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)**
 - 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17)
 - Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18–28:31)



We are in that section of the book, the third part of the book: *"...you shall be My witnesses...even to the remotest part of the earth"* (Acts 13-28). We are right in the middle of the second missionary journey. Lord willing, I would love to finish Acts 17 tonight. We just have 22 verses or so to finish the second journey, in subsequent studies.

That is what the second journey looked like:



These are all the places that Paul has been, and he is now in the midst of his Athens ministry. First, his witness in Athens; he is made fun of and called a babbler. He was looked at as an itinerant philosopher, and they brought him before this place called the Areopagus—Mars Hill—which was a venue for itinerant preachers. It was not really a pulpit. It was not a bunch of people saying, Amen. It was just a place where you could get a hearing.

They brought him there because he was teaching some strange doctrines to their ears. These people, kind of like at a local Starbucks, were just sitting around all day, and their favorite thing was to hear something new. Have you guys ever been in coffee shops that are like that, where people just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk? The more novel your ideas are—fake space moon landings and Bigfoot—the bigger an audience you can get. That was what the Areopagus was like, but it gave Paul a chance to present the gospel.

His speech, which is a classic speech, is given in Acts 17:22-31. Then when we hit Acts 17:32-34, which I am hoping we could do tonight, we have the response of the Athenians. He is at the part of his speech where it is to an unknown God. There has been a brief introduction and then he starts off with the characteristics of God.

VII. Athens Ministry (Acts 17:16-34)

A. Paul's witness (16-21)

B. Paul's speech (22-31)

1. Location (22a)

2. Introduction (22b-23a)

3. Unknown God described (23b-28)

a. Introduction (23b)

b. Characteristics (24-28)

1. Creator (24)

2. Sufficient (25)

3. Humanity's creator (26)

4. Purpose: that men might seek Him (27)

5. Man's preserver (28)

4. Man's responsibility (29-31)

C. Athenians' response (32-34)

He has talked about God as Creator (Acts 17:24); God as sufficient (Acts 17:25); the fact that we owe our origin to one man, we are all linked to Adam (Acts 17:26); how God has divided humanity into different boundaries or nations to prevent tower of Babel totalitarianism, so that men might have the freedom to seek Him (Acts 17:27). Then he gets to Acts 17:28, and we will pick it up there where he talks about God as man's preserver.

Notice what he says there in Acts 17:28:

"for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your poets have said, 'For we also are His children'" (Acts 17:28).

You will notice (and we made a point of this last time) that Paul does not start his speech there on Mars Hill with the Scriptures as he does in the synagogues. His habit is always to go to the synagogue first. He did that with Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). He did that in Berea (Acts 17:10). He did it in Athens (Acts 17:17). When he is in the synagogue with the Jews, he always starts with the Scriptures.

For example, Acts 17:1 says:

"Now when they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:1-3).

He would seek to show from the Scriptures that Jesus is in fact the long awaited Messiah. He does that in the synagogues because he is with people, Jewish people, Hebrews that respect Hebrew Bible (which we call Old Testament). The Scripture being referenced here is not the New Testament because we do not have a New Testament yet. It is the completed canon of the Old Testament.

But when he is on Mars Hill (and he did this once before in Lystra amongst non-Jewish Gentile unbelievers), he does not start with the Scriptures because that would not do him any good because they do not accept the Scriptures. So he starts with the revelation of God that they knew, which is general revelation.

God has spoken in two books: general revelation and special revelation. General revelation is everything you can see all around you. You do not have to know anything about the Bible to see it—the handiwork of God in creation. Special revelation is what God has spoken in Scripture. If people will not accept the authority of the Scripture, then he starts with the revelation that they did know, which are creation, conscience, and these kinds of things which also point to the existence of God.

That is what Paul is doing here. He is appealing to general revelation because he is with a non-Jewish, unsaved people. He obviously knew their beliefs pretty well because he starts quoting from their own pagan poets.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum has a comment here where he talks about all of the different pagan poets that Paul is referring to on the Areopagus on Mars Hill. Fruchtenbaum says:

"The fifth characteristic is that God is the Preserver of man (v. 28). Paul pointed to the fact that 'in him we live and move, and have our being.' This was the proof of God's nearness. Instead of Stoic pantheism—"1

Now remember, some of these folks are Stoics, some are Epicureans. We talked about that when we were back in Acts 17:18. So he knows their belief systems pretty well, and he knows what parts of theology as revealed in general revelation go against their pagan belief systems.

Fruchtenbaum says that this was the proof of God's nearness.

"Instead of Stoic pantheism, there was real immanence [that means nearness] with God. Paul provided an ascending scale, reaching a climax in God:

- We live; therefore we have life.
- We move; therefore, there is movement.
- We have our being; therefore, there is existence.

Then Paul reminded his listeners that some of their own poets have said the same things, among them are Aratus of Soli (315-240 B.C.) and the already mentioned Cretan poet Epimenides, who had this to say to the god of Zeus:

- They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—
- The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!"
- But thou art not dead: thou livest and abidest for ever,
- "For in thee we live and move and have our being."2

He quotes that to Titus, who is trying to be a pastor on the island of Crete. How would you like to pastor that group of a bunch of people that are liars, evil beasts, and idle bellies? He quotes Epimenides to prove the character of these people.

That is exactly what Paul says right there in Acts 17:28:

"for in Him we move we live and move and exist, even as some of your own poets have said..." (Acts 17:28).

He is giving them truths about God that they themselves could even recognize in general revelation.

¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 372-73.

² Ibid.

Fruchtenbaum says:

"Paul quoted the same poet in Titus 1:12. Another poet would have been Cleanthes, the son of Phanius of Assos and head of the Stoic School in Athens from 263 to 232 B.C."³

It is impressive that Paul had a total grasp of Hebrew Bible, and it is also impressive that he had a grasp of pagan philosophy to the point where he knew which parts of it, without endorsing all of it, pointed to the truth.

Fruchtenbaum says:

The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary notes: 'His Hymn to Zeus, a surviving poem, contains the words quoted by Paul in his address before the Areopagus Court (Acts 17:28).' Regarding Zeus, Cleanthes wrote: 'For we are your offspring.'⁴

Does that sound familiar? Because that is exactly what Paul says here at the end of Acts 17:18: *""For we also are His children.""*

What is Paul doing here? Is he giving a blanket endorsement of pagan literature and saying it all has truth in it? No. He is quoting parts of it that even paganism recognizes is true. It is not an endorsement of everything that these pagan poets say, but he could recognize the parts of it that were worth retaining, that were actually biblically accurate, because God has spoken in two sources: He has spoken in special revelation, and He has also spoken in general revelation.

It is interesting, when you talk about the Flood in Noah's day, eight people were saved on Noah's ark. It is fascinating to learn that there are 300 flood legends out there besides what you read about in the Bible. It is an interesting story. They talk about an ark. One of them talks about eight people being saved.

It is interesting that their dimensions of the ark are different. Engineers have looked at the measurements of that ark and it would not really float, it would kind of roll over like a bottle in water. Whereas you look at the dimensions of the ark described in the Bible, and there have been engineers that look at that. If you are interested in that, I would recommend the book of the guy's last name is Woodmorappe. His book is "Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study." He says that, unlike the pagan flood stories, the biblical account gives engineering dimensions that would float perfectly in the midst of a storm. The pagan renditions would not.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Also, the pagan renditions deny sin. The reason there was a flood is the gods were trying to take a nap and the earth dwellers were too noisy, and so they sent a flood. They are also not monotheistic, but the Bible says there is one God. These pagan flood accounts give you this idea that the gods (there were many gods) were trying to take a nap and they got irritated with the earth dwellers, and so they sent a flood. What does that show us? It basically shows us that the Flood account really did happen because they all have this similar storyline from somewhere, and it was passed down through oral tradition. Moses came along about the year 1446 and gives the right edition of what happened.

These flood account stories existed on the books centuries before Moses wrote the Book of Genesis. Where do they get this story from? They obviously took something that was true and they kept the true parts, but then the parts of it that did not fit their pagan belief system, they changed. They got rid of sin in their story. They got rid of monotheism in their story. They tampered with the dimensions of the ark.

As you study these different accounts (I had to read a lot of them in seminary) there is something called Enuma Elish, which is more of a creation story. There is something called the Epic of Gilgamesh, which if I remember correctly, is more of a flood story. It is interesting that they thought that there were parts of the Genesis account that were true because it reads very similar to those exceptions I mentioned a little earlier. It is very similar to what we read in the Book of Genesis, but they changed some things. Even in those pagan flood accounts, there are some things that are accurate, although it is not some kind of carte blanche approval of everything that they wrote.

That is the idea that Paul is working with here. There are some things in paganism that are accurate, and Paul knows pagan philosophy well enough to go into the parts of the story that were correct and uses them as a springboard to preach the gospel. But when Paul does that, he does it as an apostle. He is not giving a carte blanche endorsement of everything in those pagan poets.

It is like people quoting Thomas Jefferson. We all quote Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence: "...are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." You can quote that and say that Thomas Jefferson was completely correct in what he said. However, there are things about Thomas Jefferson that I do not think I would touch with a ten-foot pole, depending on what phase of his life you are dealing with. He had a skewed view of the Trinity. He also was an actual slave owner, even though he said in the Declaration of Independence that we are endowed with unalienable rights. People have all these excuses for them, like in Virginia it was illegal to let your slaves go, and all of these kinds of things.

My point is that when you quote the Declaration of Independence, you are not saying everything that Thomas Jefferson ever said or wrote is wonderful. What he said in the Declaration of Independence is so important that we quote him selectively. That is what Paul is doing with these pagan poets. He is not giving some kind of carte blanche—

everything that they wrote is great. What he is doing is he is finding the parts of general revelation that are accurate, and he is using that as a springboard to teach the gospel.

He does it this way because he cannot use the Old Testament. They would laugh at him, since on Mars Hill the Old Testament had no validity. That is what Paul is doing in Acts 17:28 when he quotes these pagan poets.

There is a lot going on today in Christian education where the big mantra is "All truth is God's truth." They think they are qualified to go into Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud and try to find that needle in the haystack and integrate it with Scripture. That is called the integrationist movement. I am not even sure we are qualified to be able to do that.

Paul did it as an apostle, but we are not apostles. He was directed by the Holy Spirit in a very unique and special way to record God's truth, so he could obviously have discernment and make calls that the rest of us really are not qualified to make, but he did it here. He found some things in paganism that they all had read and known, that were true. He is using that as a springboard to preach the gospel.

He has described God. He has given tremendous theology there in Acts 17:23-28 based on things that they could see, things that they were familiar with, things all around them. When you are sharing with people you have to be sensitive as to what kind of person it is you are sharing with. If you are sharing with someone that respects the Old Testament like a Jewish person that is a great opportunity to use the Old Testament to point towards Jesus.

That approach may not work so well with someone that has no Jewish background at all and does not believe that the Bible at all is inspired. If you are dealing with someone like that, you might appeal to general revelation. Where did everything come from? The teleological argument, as it is called, the argument from design. If there is design, there must be a Designer, right? Everybody knows that. That argument might work really well with someone that has no respect for Scripture, because you are appealing to the Scripture that they know, because God has revealed Himself in two sources.

You might make an appeal to the conscience—"con" with "science"—knowledge. The word "conscience" means "with knowledge." According to Romans 2 (this is also part of general revelation), everyone has an invisible barometer inside of them of right and wrong. Everybody knows the Ten Commandments, whether they have ever read them or not, because they are written on our hearts. When they steal something, they know it is wrong. Conscience alternatively excuses and accuses.

One of the aspects of general revelation is conscience. Psychologists say the problem is that everybody feels guilty. The reason everybody feels guilty is because we are guilty. We violate conscience constantly. When you are dealing with someone that is unsaved, that does not have any respect or knowledge of the Scripture, you might say

something like, "Have you ever stolen anything?" When I say "steal something" I mean any little thing like a paper clip, taking it home from the office that is not yours.

If you have stolen something that makes you a thief. You say, "I only did it once." Is that what they say in a court of law? "Your Honor, I only knocked off the liquor store one time." A crime is a crime. Everybody knows that they are criminals instinctively because of something in general revelation called conscience.

That is a great opportunity to explain to someone that someone bigger than you put that there to show you that you need a savior. My point is that you are using different approaches depending on the audience that you are talking to. That is exactly what Paul is doing here on Mars Hill.

Now that he has described God from general revelation, he gets to what he wants them to do with the information: What is their responsibility? They are supposed to do three things. The first thing he wants them to do is to reject idolatry (Acts 17:29). He says:

"Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man" (Acts 17:29).

God is not a rock. God is not a tree. God is not a statue. Remember, Paul looked throughout Athens and he saw these different statues and idols, and he was grieved; he was provoked. You see that back in Acts 17:16:

"Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols" (Acts 17:16).

You notice he is quoting their pagan literature, but he is not endorsing paganism. He is using it as a springboard to teach the truth. He says, "Stop being idolaters. God is not something that can be contained by gold, silver, or stone. He is not a painting. He is not a picture. He is not a portrait." Paul is telling them to reject God as they understand Him and embrace God as He really is.

Once you do that, you stop being an idolater, because an idolater is someone that worships something in the place of God. That is how God wants to be approached. He wants to be approached through the vehicle of truth. Jesus said that in John 4:23-24, as he was speaking to the woman at the well. He said:

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

How do you become a worshiper of God? Is it a feeling? Is it a musical instrument? Is it the liver quiver of the day? What it is is you worshiping God as He is—not how we prefer Him to be, but how He actually is. Once you move in that direction, then you are an authentic worshiper.

Those are the types of people that God is actually looking for. He is looking for people that will worship Him as he really is. A lot of people worship God because they think they are going to get something from Him. He is going to make me rich or something like that, when that is not a promise that God ever made that all of His children would get rich. It would be nice if He made that promise, but He never made that promise. In fact, what He tells you is that sometimes you lose everything if you follow Jesus as He is. Don't come to God with some kind of false idea, false expectation, but come to God as He really is. That is true worship.

Worship really has nothing to do with musical instruments, and it has really little to do with how it makes you feel at any given moment. You can worship God with contemporary music. You can worship God with liturgical music. You can worship God a cappella. Those kinds of things are just incidentals. What God is really looking for is the truth element. As long as the lyrics and things like that are truthful, then that is what really matters to God. Are they biblically accurate? Are we coming to God as He is, not based on our preferences? That is what Paul is saying here to these Athenians reject idolatry.

These are three R's, by the way: reject idolatry; repent; reason.

Look at Acts 17:30:

"Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to all men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30).

What does that mean, to repent? The Greek is "metanoēō" (μετανοέω), which is a compound word—two words making up a single word. You recognize "meta" as in "change." "Your cancer has metastasized," the doctor says (which is never good news), meaning it has changed from one part of your body to another. That is what "meta" means, as in "metamorphosis." The second is "noeō" where we get the word "notion" or "idea" which comes out of the mind. So "metanoēō" (μετανοέω) means "to change your mind."

That is what he is telling these people to do. "You have been worshiping all of these idols. Now you know the truth, I want you to change your mind about who God is; and as a result of that, change of mind. I want you to place your trust in that God for salvation."

In that sense, "repentance" is a synonym for "believe." What is a synonym? Different word, same meaning. Whenever you see this word "repentance" as held out to unsaved people—what they have to do to be made right with God—a synonym for that is "to believe." "To believe" means "to trust."

When you were saved, did you believe or did you repent? The answer is yes; you did both. The moment you placed your trust in Christ for salvation is the moment your mind changed about Him. I heard the gospel when I was 16. I understood for the first time. For whatever reason, I finally got it that we are not saved on the basis of works. We are saved on the basis of His work, and I placed my trust in what He accomplished for me. Instead of trusting in my own works. I trusted in His work. The moment I placed my trust in Him, my mind automatically changed.

You cannot really believe without repenting. True faith is accompanied by repentance, change of mind. In that sense, when you see the word "repent" in the Bible, used in the context of what unsaved people have to do, it is a synonym for "faith." Lewis Sperry Chafer says this:

"This vital newness of mind is part of believing, after all, and therefore it may be used as a synonym for believing at times (cf. Acts 7:30; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9). Repentance nevertheless cannot be added to believing as a condition of salvation, because upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only (cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31)."⁵

The way the gospel is wrongly taught today is if you want to be made right with God, there are two steps. We call this the Texas Two Step. You have to repent. Every time you see a plus there is a problem, because there is only one condition of salvation. You have to repent and, number two, believe. If you believe without repenting, then you are not a Christian.

Unfortunately, they come along and they define repentance as penance. In fact, the Rheims English translation, instead of using repentance, we will put in the word "penance," because that is the Roman Catholic English translation. It sounds the same, right? "Repent" kind of sounds like "penance." But if that is the way you think, you have a false gospel.

Penance is something you do on the outside. You have to show contrition; you have to cry a river; you have got to walk an aisle; you have to sign a card; you have to stand up in front of man; you have to pick up your cross and follow Jesus. All of that goes under the category of penance. Then they say that you have to do that plus you have to believe.

⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Vol. 7, Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 265-66.

If that is the gospel, then the gospel is based on what I do, not based on what He did. I am not receiving what He did as a gift. Paul says very clearly that by the works of the law no man shall be justified (Galatians 2:16). People think you have to do something extra besides believing in order to be a true Christian. It is a horrible burden to put people under.

If you think that the gospel is that you have to repent of all of your sins plus believe, then how do you know if you have really done penance for all of your sins? How would you ever know that? What about sins that we committed years ago that we cannot even remember? So you spend your whole life as a Christian, wondering if I have done enough penance.

It is a damnable heresy because they are defining repentance by this Latin word. The Bible was not written in Latin. It was written in Koine Greek. What is the Greek definition of "repentance"? It is "change of mind." It has nothing to do with renouncing your sins and trying harder and crying a river and feeling bad about yourself.

God is not interested in accepting any of us on that basis. What He wants us to do is to place our trust in what He did. Once you do that, your mind just changed. They are two sides of the same coin. That is why Chafer said that "believe" is actually a synonym for "repentance."

What about sins in the life of the Christian? What about those? Don't worry about that. God will take care of that after you get saved. After you get saved and the Holy Spirit is inside of you, God will start to deal with you about profanity, and maybe sarcasm or embezzlement or all those other things. He is pretty good at pointing those things out.

What is happening is that we are getting the cart before the horse. People think the gospel is to clean yourself up and come to Jesus. I have heard preachers say that, but that is not the gospel. The gospel is to come to Jesus on Jesus' terms. And the cleaning up? He will take care of that. He deals with us all differently, but those are related to growth. They are not related to initial justification before God, where He declares you His child.

How do I know all this is true? Look down at Acts 17:34. It says:

"But some men joined him and believed..." (Acts 17:34).

I thought they repented (Acts 17:30), but now it is saying that they believed. Which is it? It is both, because repentance and belief, understood the way I am explaining them, are two sides of the same coin. Whenever you are seeing "repentance" in the Book of Acts, just keep reading and you are going to run into "believe" at some point, because these terms are used interchangeably.

Let me show you one other place where this happens. It is in Acts 2:38. This is Peter's opening sermon on the day of Pentecost:

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

There he is using "metanoēō" (μετανοέω)—to change your mind about Christ.

Then a few verses later it says:

"And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).

Which is it? Did they repent or did they believe? They repented (Acts 2:38), and they believed (Acts 2:44). Which is it? It is both because repent and believe are two sides of the same coin. This is what Chafer is talking about when he says that repentance is just a synonym for believing. That is all it is.

There is nothing in the Bible (if you guys can find the verse, I will be happy to eat my words), but there is nothing in the Bible that says that to be made right with God I have to repent of my sins. It never says that. It is not a repentance away from something as much as it is a repentance or a change of mind toward something. I am turning towards God. I am rejecting a false notion of who God is. I am turning towards Him in truth, knowing who He is as the Son of God and that He has the power to save me. I am placing my trust in Him.

When I do that, my mind changed. When I trusted, which was what "believed" means, my mind changed. It is two sides of the same coin. There is no Texas two-step here—no multiple steps on justification. Try to keep the gospel the gospel. If you garble it, it is not God's gospel anymore—it is man's gospel.

Going back to Acts 17:30, Paul says:

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30).

What does this mean here when it says, *"Therefore God has overlooked the times of ignorance"*? What it is saying is that the day of idolatry is over. "You know the truth." That is what he is saying. "The day of worshiping these images and this temple to an unknown God, is all done. You are now responsible for what you know. Truth has been communicated to you," as Paul has used general revelation as a springboard for truth. Now that they know the truth, God is no longer going to put up with idolatry, worshiping God not as He is, but how people want Him to be, because now they know the truth.

The same thing was said in Lystra to another pagan audience. Acts 14:16 says:

*"In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their ways"
(Acts 14:16).*

That is very similar to what is being said here: *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent"
(Acts 17:30).*

When it comes to this issue of idolatry, God never let Israel get away with anything. That is why they went into a 70-year captivity. They were told at Sinai, "No gods before Me." However, when it comes to non-Israelites, pagans, it is almost like God put up with it. He put up with it until His Son showed up in truth. Now the age of God putting up with paganism and idolatry is over. "God overlooked idolatry of the past, but He is not overlooking it anymore because you know the truth." Paul is saying the exact same thing to Lystra, developing the attributes of God to a pagan audience from general revelation.

Number one, reject idolatry. Number two, repent. Number three, coming judgment. Look what he says in Acts 17:31, as Paul gives a reason why they should repent:

"because He has fixed a day—"

Fixed means it is non-negotiable, right? It is as if the train is coming, and you cannot change that. The only thing you can do is get out of its way. That is basically what he is saying here.

"because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world—"

In Greek this is *oikoumenē* (οἰκουμένη), which, as I told you when we were back in Acts 17:9, that it could refer to the known world, but it can also refer to all the world, depending on the context. Here it refers to all the world.

"because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

We know this judgment is coming because the tomb is empty, and the resurrection of Jesus is now an objective, verifiable, and historical fact. The enemies of Christianity could have shut the whole thing down in a nanosecond, all they had to do was go into the tomb and get the body, put it on a cart or something and drag it through the city streets of Jerusalem and say, "This whole resurrected Christ thing that the apostles were aggressively preaching is a myth."

They could have stopped everything. There were plenty of people, believe me, at that time that would have loved to stop Christianity, but they never did that. Isn't that weird? It was a very simple thing. They could have just stopped it dead in its tracks. They never did that. Do you know why? Because there was no longer a body. He rose from the dead.

Because He rose from the dead, that is proof that there is coming upon this world a judgment which will not be like the miscarriages of justice that we see today, where judges do crazy things and juries turn blind eyes to evidence and all of these kinds of things—run away juries. You are not going to have that in this judgment. It is going to be done with righteousness and it is fixed. It is like a train that is coming. You cannot stop it, all you can do is on the right side. We know it is going to happen. Jesus is going to be the judge. We know that is true because we have a precursor to it: the objective fact of the empty tomb.

What he is referencing here is the Great White Throne Judgment, which is in Revelation 20:11-15. It is a terrible judgment. I do not even know if we, as God's people, are going to be around to see it. I do not want to see it, to be honest with you. It is a record of everyone whose name is not found in the Lamb's Book of Life as they are brought into resurrected bodies and emptied out of Hades itself. Their names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life, so they are thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet already are, and where the devil was just thrown into, back in Revelation 20:10. That is their fate. Wow.

That judgment is coming, and I cannot stop it. I wish I could stop it, but it is not left up to me to stop it because it is fixed. The only thing I can do is get on the right side of God so that I am not on the wrong side of God when this judgment happens. The only way to get on the right side of God is to do what Paul says here: repent—change your mind about Jesus, which is a synonym for "believe" or "trust" in him.

There are different judgments in the Bible. There is the Sheep and Goat Judgment, and the judgment of the Jews. That is for people that survive the Tribulation Period. Then there is our judgment, the Bema Seat, where we are rewarded or not, based on how we allow the Lord to express Himself through us during this earthly sojourn. That will be in the Father's house right after the Rapture.

But the one I am speaking of here is this one, the Great White Throne. That is the one Paul is talking about. It is the one that is fixed, the one that is coming, the one that will be done with complete and total righteousness. The objective fact of the empty tomb tells us that this judgment is coming. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can pull off this judgment, right?

That is quite an evangelistic presentation without even using a Bible. Paul is starting from what they knew and he is reasoning to truth. It is absolutely brilliant what he does here.

Is Jesus going to be the judge? When you look at Acts 17:31, it says:

"because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man [Jesus] whom He has appointed [Jesus], having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

That is Jesus. Jesus is ultimately the One under the Father's delegated authority, orchestrating the Great White Throne Judgment.

Jesus said this in John 5:22:

"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).

What should you do? Three Rs: reject idolatry (Acts 17:29); repent (Acts 17:30); and the reason you should repent is that the train is coming (Acts 17:31). You do not want to be on the wrong side; you do not want to be caught in the middle. It is fixed.

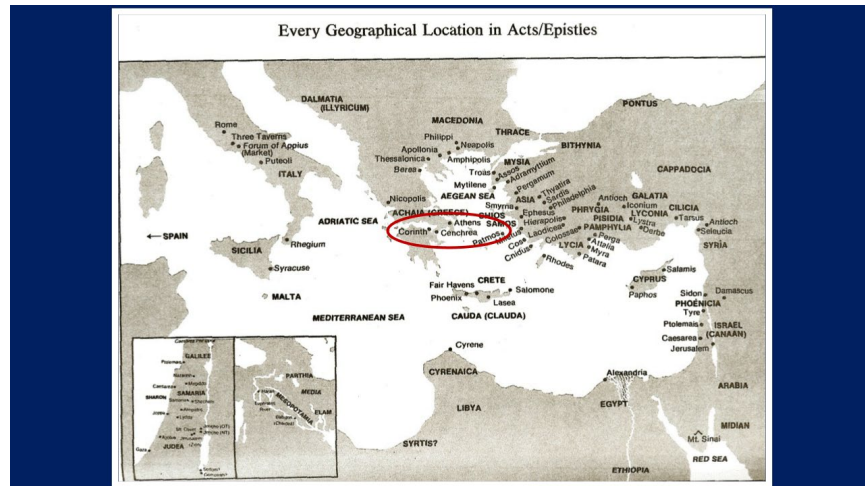
How do they respond? Do they all stand up and say, "Praise the Lord"? No. The response is very mixed. You have two negative responses (Acts 17:32), Paul leaves (Acts 17:33), and then you get one positive response. (Acts 17:34).

What are the two negative responses? The first thing people did was to make fun of Paul (Acts 17:32):

"Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer—"

Why would they be sneering? Because Gnosticism was dominant in this area, and the Gnostics taught that the physical world is bad and the spiritual world is good. "What do you mean God became a man? That is ridiculous. Don't you know the physical world is evil? Why would God become a man?"

Keep in mind that Athens is not too far from Corinth. It is right there just across the land bridge, the isthmus. This philosophy existed in Corinth, just like it did Athens. When you understand that, you understand why Paul has to include the resurrection chapter to the Corinthians, because they were also steeped in Gnosticism, that the physical world is bad. There is a whole chapter in your Bible on resurrection.



First Corinthians 15:14 is one of the most famous verses:

"and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

All of Christianity revolves around this resurrection, and the Corinthian church was throwing it overboard because they had been seduced by gnostic dualism. That is why they are sneering at Paul. "This is ridiculous."

Their second response is also negative. It is postponement:

"Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, 'We shall hear you again concerning this'" (Acts 17:32).

In other words, they took a decision and they postponed it—they kicked the can down the road. "I will make up my mind next month, next year, next time you are traveling through, but not today." When you postpone a decision, you know what you just did? You made a decision. Postponements are tricky. We think we are postponing a decision, but actually you are making a decision not to make a decision, which is a decision.

It is very dangerous to gamble with your eternity that way. "I will get on to this stuff next month." How do you know there is going to be a next month? Is there something guaranteed that we are going to live till next month? How many people in this flock have passed away since I started here in 2010? I can think of five, ten, fifteen, or twenty God-fearing people whose time was up. I have seen a lot of others that have come close to death.

My own father passed away, a figure larger than life, the associate justice in the California judicial system, California Appellate Court, a triathlete—my hero growing up,

my dad. He hit 88 and it was time to go. He was saved, though. Praise God. When he was dying, I said, "Dad, Jesus has this whole thing under control." He said, "I am really glad to hear that." He knew the truth. We had talked about the truth. He had trusted in the truth, but he needed a little bit of affirmation, which was one of the great ministries that God gave me at my father's bedside.

When is your number up? Who knows? So how dumb is it to say, "I am going to postpone a decision"? You postpone a decision, and you just made one. You are gambling with your future.

What does the book of Proverbs say? "Don't boast about tomorrow. You do not know what a day will behold or become." you have no idea what is going to happen tomorrow. So the first group mocked him. The second group made a postponement decision.

Paul leaves (Acts 17:33):

"So Paul went out of their midst" (Acts 17:33).

You notice that it does not say as in Acts 17:10, "The brethren immediately sent Paul away." We get the idea that this happened in such a way that there was not a church that started right away. There later became a church at Athens. We think one of the people mentioned in Acts 17:34 was influential as a leader in the church, but the church probably did not start that split second. It would take some time.

Then, happily, there is a positive response—two negative responses, Paul leaves, and one positive response.

"But some men joined and believed..." (Acts 17:34).

Wait a minute. I thought they were supposed to repent?

"...God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30).

These people did not repent; they believed. Why use a different word? Because they are synonyms—different words, same meaning. They trusted in the message, and more important than the message, is the person of Jesus Christ. When they did that, their mind changed (metanoēō, [μετανοέω]). It does not say that they repented of their sins. It does not say "penance." They just trusted in Christ. When you trust in Christ, you are not trusting in anything else for your eternity and the safekeeping of your soul, meaning your mind changed.

"But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34).

Who is this Dionysius the Areopagite? Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes:

"While no church was planted at this time, some did believe: 'Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.' The fact that Dionysius was described as an Areopagite showed that he was a member of the Council of Areopagus. He was convinced and became a believer. According to fourth-century historian Eusebius, Dionysius became the bishop of the church of Athens and died as a martyr. Also mentioned is Damaris. She was probably an aristocrat, as was Dionysius. There were others, though unnamed, who also believed."⁶

So you will notice that a woman gets saved. Look at that. Luke even makes a point by saying, "...*a woman named Damaris*." Why does he keep bringing up women? Because he is showing that the gospel is for everyone. Women were treated like subclass citizens when this was written, and Luke is trying to show that the gospel is for everybody—if they are on the outer edges of society, if they are rejected, the gospel is for them too.

As you go through Luke's writings, particularly in Acts, he keeps saying, "The women, the women, the women, the women, the women," over and over again. He makes that point because the guy he is writing to is named Theophilus, who was a Roman and looked at by the Jews as a traitor or an imperial conqueror or something like that. Maybe not a traitor, but a conqueror, the enemy. Luke is saying, "Theophilus, the gospel is for you too."

Who was Paul's first convert in Europe? Lydia, a dealer of purple (Acts 16:14). What you are seeing here is the outworking of 1 Corinthians 1:21. Remember, Corinth is very near Athens. This is what Paul would say to the Corinthians later:

"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

God is not known through the great intellects of the world. He is known through the foolishness of preaching, and the ones that know Him are some, not everyone, because the whole thing looks so ridiculous. A lot of people just laughed at Him.

By the way, when the Kingdom comes (Isaiah 11:6-9), it says:

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:9).

Obviously the earth is not filled with the knowledge of the Lord here, because not everybody got saved; only some got saved. That fits exactly with what Jesus said would

⁶ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 374-75.

happen while the Kingdom is in postponement. It would be preached to different audiences depending on how the heart has been prepared. In most audiences, it would be suffocated because the soil is not right, but the seed would fall on one batch of soil that would be very good, and it would bear a crop of 30, 60, and 100 fold.

There is one group where people are going to hear it and they are going to receive it, but the other soils, for the most part, people will reject it. Jesus says that is going to be the norm in gospel proclamations, throughout the Church Age that we are living in now with the Kingdom and postponement.

That takes us to the end of Paul's Athens ministry. His witness in Athens, his speech, and the Athenians' response. Now he is going to move into Corinth. Read, if you could for next time, Acts 18:1-18. I am going to try to finish the second missionary journey before we hit our summer break. We have half of Acts 18 to get through the next few weeks.