

Responding To God's Word

Acts 17

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As I said, we're on the second missionary journey of Paul. By way of reminding you, there were three journey's: journey 1, journey 2, and journey 3. Journey 2 started at the end of Acts 15 and began in Acts 16 with the Macedonian call. They went across the Aegean Sea to the continent of Europe. They went into Philippi, the Lord opened Lydia's heart and she believed, the slave girl is converted, the Philippian jailer, Paul and Silas driven out of Philippi, and they come, beginning in chapter 17, to the city of Thessalonica. Now, I'm going to outline this chapter for you, if you're taking notes. In verses 1-9, we have the city of Thessalonica, and I'll talk about that and where it is (we'll look at the map). In response to the Word, we see that they are resisting the Word. There were those who believed, but primarily there was opposition and resistance to the Word of God. Wherever God's Word is preached, you'll find these different responses.

Begin following with me in Acts 17:1. Luke says, "Now when they," the fact that he says "they" in verse 1 indicates Luke is no longer with them in their group. Luke stayed back in Philippi, no doubt, to pastor and disciple them, so "they" being Paul, Silas, and Timothy, "had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ," or Messiah, "must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ," the Messiah. "And some of them believed," here's the response, "and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort," King James for bad dudes. They were just bad guys, "and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people," that is, they were looking for Paul and Silas who were staying at Jason's house, and they were going to bring them out to the people. "And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken security of Jason," or bail of Jason, "and of the other, they let them go."

Go back with me to verse 1 for just a moment. As I pointed out, Luke, most likely, stayed in Philippi, and they come to the city of Thessalonica. (Let's throw the map up on the screen, if you can.) Basically, we have here the second missionary journey. It started in Antioch, went to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, this area here, modern-day Turkey, known as Asia; and they traveled over here to Troas. They got the Macedonian call and sailed across the Aegean Sea right here and land in Neapolis. They go into Philippi. Right now, we've just left Philippi. We're going down to Thessalonica, and then you can see very close to Thessalonica is Berea. Then, Paul

takes a ship and comes down into southern Greece, to Athens, where we're going to be tonight. (We can take the map away from the screen.)

When you're going through the book of Acts, it really helps you to study geography. I was thinking about it today. When I was in school, by the way, I was a horrible, horrible student; so there's hope for your kids, ladies and gentlemen. I was a horrible student. I thought, Man, if I could go back to school again, I would just love geography, history, and those things that I was just bored stiff over, and to be able to pay attention to these things. Basically, we see here that they come to Thessalonica. That was the chief city of that area. Again, it was a Roman colony, a large, metropolitan area, with a synagogue there, which meant there were at least 10 male Jews. There were probably many Jews there, unlike Philippi. There's a colony of Jews there, so Paul goes to the synagogue. I want you to notice it says, "as his manner was." I want you to notice the methods here of Paul the Apostle. In Romans 1, remember Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel," the good news, "of Christ," why? "for it is the power," the dynamis, the dynamic, "power of God unto salvation," and he said it like this, "...to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," or the Gentile. That's really what Paul was doing. He was going to the Jew first.

I think the church today is making a mistake in not seeking to evangelize Jews. We've kind of just left them alone and thought, They have their religion, why bother them? In reality, we should be praying for and reaching out to them and all peoples in all lands everywhere. The Bible says to go into all the world and preach the gospel, right? It doesn't matter who they are or what their religion is, we need to reach them with the truth of Jesus Christ, especially the Jew, "...to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." I do believe also that the church is lacking in power today because it is no longer preaching the gospel. It's preaching philosophy, psychology, a social gospel, and all kinds of other things—self-help kind of pep talks, feel-good messages—but it has abandoned the gospel, and that's where the power of God is.

In Billy Graham's last message to America that he gave sitting in the chair in his house, he said that the Cross is the power of the gospel—bringing people back to the Cross and preaching the Cross. We need preaching today that focuses on Jesus Christ and the good news. It's not good views, it's good news. It's an historical record of Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. He's the Savior of the world.

Notice, Paul starts with Jewish evangelism, as his manner was, in verse 2. I want you to notice these four things that Paul does. He reasons with them. Now, it says that he did it for three sabbath days, so this would be three weeks. By the way, when you study Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, (1 and 2 Thessalonians) there's a lot there in that epistle about the coming again of Jesus Christ, that the Lord is returning. It's full of what theologians call eschatology, the study of future things. It's interesting that Paul was only there for three weeks yet felt these new believers needed to know about the coming again of the Lord and the revelation of the Antichrist and the things about the end times. That's another mistake the church is making today, too. We've abandoned the study of prophecy and the hope of the coming again of Jesus Christ which is all through the Scriptures.

For three sabbath days, Paul did these four things. First, he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. Notice, "out of the Scriptures." Would to God that preachers today would preach and give a reasonable defense of the gospel out of the Scriptures. All preachers should be Bible preachers. There's really no other kind of preaching. It should be the opening of the Bible, the reading of the Bible, the exposition of the Bible, and the application of the Bible. I believe the pew should demand that, by the way. I believe that if more people in churches supported churches, went to churches, or the churches they go to, if the pastor isn't preaching the Word, they would say, "We want you to preach the Word. We want the Bible, that's what we want." Should the day ever come, God forbid, that I'm not preaching the Bible, you need to kick me outta here, or just kick me, one or the other. Do something to get me back in the Bible. We need to preach the Word. He "reasoned with them out of the scriptures." Remember, in Isaiah 1:18 God says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD." Christianity is a reasonable religion. You can reason with people out of the Scriptures. When it says, "out of the scriptures," that was the Old Testament. They didn't have the book of Acts, it was being written. They didn't have the New Testament epistles, they were just being written; so Paul, using the Old Testament Scriptures went into the synagogue and began to reason with the Jews. If you want to reach Jews for Jesus, you need to use the Old Testament to show them that Jesus is their promised Messiah.

In Luke 24, Jesus used this method. In His post-resurrection appearance to the two on the road to Emmaus it says that He opened the Scriptures and showed them that it was necessary that Messiah must suffer and die and be risen again from the dead. Later on they said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" We need to open the Old Testament and show them Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Not only did Paul reason with them out of the Scriptures, but notice secondly, verse 2, that he opened the Scriptures unto them which means he explained them. Thirdly, "alleging," verse 3, "that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead," that it was necessary Messiah had to suffer and then rise from the dead. That "alleging" indicates to prove. The word literally, in the Greek, means to lay alongside. It means to use evidence to prove something. They would lay it alongside to prove something. He reasoned, he explained, and he proved that Christ was the Messiah; and He had to die, be buried, and rise again from the dead. Then he says, "that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ," Messiah. Whenever you see that word "Christ," it's a reference to the idea that He's the Messiah. The Old Testament would be Messiah and the New Testament would be Christ, which means "the anointed one."

Notice that he preached. The word is kerysso. It means to herald. It means to proclaim. It's the proclaiming. It's the proclamation. It's not the discussion or the debate, it's the heralding of not, as I said, good views but the good news about Jesus Christ. Here's the response. We saw it when we read the text. "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." It describes those Gentiles as well, and some of them God fearers, no doubt, that were in the synagogue that responded and believed. There were those who responded in unbelief (verse 5), "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and

gathered a company, and...assaulted the house of Jason.” Whenever the Word of God is preached faithfully, clearly, and powerfully, there are those who believe and those who do not. There’s always a line drawn—those who receive Christ, those who reject Christ, those who trust in Christ, and those who reject Christ—and to procrastinate, as we’re going to see at the end of Acts 17, to say, “Well, I’ll think about it,” is actually a statement of rejecting Christ Jesus. He said you’re either for Me or against Me, so the gospel’s preached, there is always that dividing line.

Notice, if you didn’t, by the way, verse 6. These guys are referred to those “that have turned the world upside down are come,” to our city. Isn’t that great? Would to God that the world was saying that about the church today, right? In reality, as we’ve often said, they weren’t turning the world upside down, they were turning the world right-side up. The world was upside down, and the world is upside down. What Christians do is turn the world right-side up by sharing the gospel, but we see here that they were resisting the Word. They “assaulted the house of Jason,” looking for Paul and Silas. They couldn’t find them, so they made Jason post bail and then he was able to go home. They kind of scoot Paul and Silas away, as we’ll see in the next verse, by night.

Notice now we move (verses 10-15) to the second city and their response; that is, to Berea. I just showed it to you on the map just a moment ago, Berea is just a little bit southwest of Thessalonica. Now, I’ve never been to Philippi. I’ve never been to Thessalonica, and I’ve never been to Berea, but I have been to Athens. Every time I read about Paul going to the Athenians, it so excites me because I’ve been there a couple of times. Athens is such a cool place to visit. Now he goes about 40 miles southwest to Berea, and we see that they are receiving the Word. In Thessalonica, they resisted the Word, and people will resist God’s Word. In Berea, we see that they’re receiving and searching the Word. Follow with me, verse 10. “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night,” Paul and his preaching, there was always either a riot or a revival or sometimes both. It was a riot to travel with Paul, literally. Everywhere he went he was causing a riot and was getting thrown in jail. Someone said the first thing he probably did was check out the jails because he knew he was going to spend the night there when he got to town. So, there was the rejection and then there was the belief. They kind of hurried Paul and Silas out of town. I thought it interesting that there’s no mention of Timothy here. It almost makes you wonder where Timothy is. Maybe he stayed a few extra days there in Thessalonica to continue mentoring and discipling the believers, but we don’t know.

In verse 10, they come to Berea, “...who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews,” again, to the Jew first. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached,” again, heralded, “of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul,” here it is again. He starts another riot, they stir up the crowd, and they send away Paul, “to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.” They stay there in Berea. “And they that

conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.” They took Paul down to a port. They put him on a boat and ship him off, and they stick around for a while. “You know, you’re causing a riot. We need you to go.” He’s sent off and goes down to Athens, and they stay there. By the way, you have now a reference to Timothy in verse 15.

The classic passage (you need to mark it in your Bible) in verse 11 that we all love so much says that those in Berea “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they,” did three things: 1) they “received the word;” 2) “they received the word with all readiness of mind;” 3) they “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” That’s why we use the phrase, “be a Berean.” Whenever you hear that term, “be a Berean,” it means be a person that is eager to search the Scriptures, eager to study the Bible, and eager to dig into God’s Word. So, they were receptive to the Word, they were ready in their minds...when it says they were more noble, by the way, it carries the idea of that they were more open, receptive, and thoughtful. It’s not talking about nobility in the sense of that they were royalty. It’s speaking of the fact that they were more responsive, receptive, and more open. They were really sponges and listening to what Paul said. They received it “with all readiness of mind,” but “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things,” what Paul was preaching, “were so.”

There are many ways to apply this, but I want to encourage you to “be a Berean.” What does that mean? It means, don’t believe everything somebody tells you, right? Open your Bible and study it for yourself. You don’t want to be critical. You don’t want to be faultfinding. You don’t want to be judgmental. You want to be receptive, but you want to think with your mind. You want to ask yourself, “Is what the preacher’s saying biblical? Is what the preacher’s saying scriptural? Is what the preacher’s saying really what the Bible’s saying?” Whether it’s John Miller, Greg Laurie, or Franklin Graham, it doesn’t matter who the preacher is on the television, radio, in the church—whoever it is—you bring your Bible. You open the Word of God, and ask yourself, “Is this what the text really says? Is this what it really means? Is that how it’s to be applied?” You read back before the text; you read after the text. This is why it can be dangerous when a preacher just takes one verse, pulls it out of context, and imposes his ideas or his own meaning on the text.

When we take the meaning out of a text, it’s called exegesis. When we put a meaning into the text it is eisegesis, we’re putting our ideas into the text. When you listen, listen carefully; and when you listen, listen thoughtfully. When you listen, listen critically. I can’t stress that enough. Too many Christians are gullible and silly. I see churches full of people listening to so-called sermons that are anything but biblical. They’re cheering, screaming, yelling, excited, are all pumped out, and what the preacher’s saying is not really even biblical; but it makes them feel good. It makes them happy, and what he’s saying is real exciting. He’s telling stories, and it’s just really a great motivational speech, but it’s not biblical. You need to ask yourself, “Is what he’s saying scriptural? Is what he’s saying biblical? Is what he’s saying true?” Because, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

The Bible has to be rightly divided. It has to be rightly interpreted and rightly applied to our

lives, so open your Bible. Study your Bible. Become a Berean. Familiarize yourself. Look up the cross-references. Study the context. Make sure that what the preacher is saying is true. They did that, and Paul wasn't above that. He didn't say, "Wait a minute. I'm Paul the Apostle. You don't need to study. You don't need to look at this. You don't need to examine these things. They're true." He welcomed their readiness and their searching the scriptures to see whether these things were true, "Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few," but satan always comes with his messengers to try to hinder the preaching of the Word.

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea," what did they do? (verse 13), "they came thither also, and stirred up the people." Satan always opposes the preaching of the gospel. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." If you preach the gospel, satan will oppose you. If anyone preaches the gospel, they'll experience opposition and attack.

In verse 15, they sent Paul to Athens, and this transitions us to verses 16-34. Now, Athens was the capital of Achaia, which is southern Greece. I won't go to the map again, but northern Greece is what's called Macedonia, and southern Greece is what's called Achaia. Athens is down toward the bottom of Greece, which is known as Achaia, but it's the capital there. It's the center of Greek culture and Greek philosophy. It was the home of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It was the city that had a population of at least two hundred thousand at this time. It was really the center of intellectualism, Greek thought, and Greek culture. The Greeks glorified man, the intellect, and their philosophy. Paul comes to Athens (verses 16-34), and now we have the ridiculing of the Word. There's the searching of the Word, the receiving of the Word, the rejecting of the Word, and now the Athenians ridicule or mock the Word, though there's always those few that do respond in faith and believing.

Let's look at it beginning in verse 16. It says, "Now while Paul waited for them," that is, Silas and Timotheus or Timothy, "at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. 17 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. 18 Then certain philosophers," what else do you want to find in Athens but philosophers, and the group of the philosophers were "of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say?" What does this storyteller say? The word "babbler" literally means seed picker in the Greek, and it means a storyteller. "...other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods," why? "because he preached," again this kerysso, this proclamation, "unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." Paul always preached Christ. Some say that when Paul was in Athens, he watered down the message and tried to make it palatable for the Athenians. I believe, clearly, that Paul, even though he connected with their Greek culture, was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

"And they took him, and brought him unto," what's called the, "Areopagus," it's also known as Mars Hill. Twice I've had the privilege of standing on Mars Hill and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, so we met up on Mars Hill. It's this little outcropping kind of west of the

Areopagus where the temple was, but he's taken to this Mars Hill. Mars Hill or the Areopagus (verse 19) is a court on religious morals. It's a courtroom kind of setting, and we don't know if Paul was actually being tried or just given a platform to express his views or ideas, but he's talking to these Epicureans and Stoicks. I'll come back to them in just a moment. He says, "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?" We want to know what you're speaking. Verse 20, "For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21 (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.)" Now, doesn't that describe the intellectuals of our day? In our universities—professing themselves to be wise they become fools—they get together and all they want to do is talk about something new, something novel, and something trite.

Paul comes to the famous city of Athens, a beautiful place, and encounters these two philosophies: Epicureanism and Stoicism. Epicureans believed and practiced that pleasure was the chief good and goal of life. The Epicurean philosophy is eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. It's the playboy philosophy. This was the Hugh Hefner's before Hugh Hefner came on the scene. Just have a good time. Do whatever feels good. Their view of the divine was that God was transcendent; and God, which is true, but that God is outside of our time, space, material world, and didn't interact with man, didn't come down to man, didn't really connect with man. They had this idea that God was far off and removed, so we could kind of live however we want. It doesn't matter what you do with your body because God doesn't care about the body. He doesn't care about the physical. He doesn't care about the material. You can just kind of do whatever you want, and that philosophy is with us today.

There are also the Stoicks. Their view of God was panentheistic. That means that they believe that God was in everything. Instead of being outside and beyond our world, transcendent, they believe that God was the trees, God was the water, God was the air, God is you, and God is me. These are people that we have with us today in this world. I remember years ago my first time I ever went to the city of Santa Cruz. I'd never experienced hippieism like I'd ever seen before in my life. I remember talking to a guy at Santa Cruz. He was saying the trees were just as valuable as human beings. Trees were divine just as the flowers are divine. Animals were divine. We're all God. You are one, you are me and I am you, we are one, and we are all together. I think he was listening to the Beatles or something. Today, people have the same idea. Shirley MacLaine's discovery, "I am God," and people go to seminars and pay \$190 to find out they're divine. I'm thinking, What kind of a dumb god are you that you have to pay to find out that you're god? Or saying, "I looked in the mirror and realized I was looking at God." It's just insane. Paul encounters these two philosophies. By the way, Stoicks were fatalists. They believed that they were self-sufficient. They tried to seal themselves of love and emotions. They didn't want to feel anything, so they just went through life very stoic. It means not allowing yourself to come under the power and influence of your emotions or feelings.

They bring Paul to Mars Hill, and we have, as I said, these things (verse 16), "he saw the city wholly given to," or full of "idolatry." I want you to notice these four things about Paul. He saw the city full of idolatry. Paul wasn't in Athens as a sightseer, he was there as a soul winner. It's

fine to look at the Areopagus, the art, the statues (I've been there), and all the idols. A traveler at this time said it was easier to find an idol than it was to find a person in Athens. It was a city full of idolatry, so he saw that with his eyes. Notice what Paul felt. He was stirred in his heart, "his spirit was stirred in him." He had the emotions, the feeling of, This is horrible. This is sad. This is tragic. Sometimes people will get caught up in the esthetics and the artistry of idolatry and of the edifices that they've built or the temples. They are marvels how they build those ancient temples, but what Paul saw was through the culture. He saw through the esthetics and the artistry and saw sinners that needed Christ. We need to have that same heart. He looked through the tinsel and the exterior, and his heart was stirred. He was burdened, we might say, for their souls.

Thirdly, Paul disputed. It means that he spoke. So, he saw, he felt, and he opened his mouth and began to speak. Who did he speak with? Well, he spoke with religious people, "the Jews, and with the devout persons." He spoke with the working-class people, the blue-collar workers. He met them "in the market daily," and met with them on the streets. Then, he spoke with the sophisticated intellectuals (verse 18), "certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoicks." So, the gospel is for everyone. It's for religious people. It's for the everyday average Joe, and it's for the sophisticated intellectuals. "...he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection," again, Paul the preacher, "And they took him," because he was the preacher, "and brought him unto Areopagus," Mars Hill.

Beginning in verse 22 is the fourth thing I see about Paul; that is, Paul's sermon, what he said. So, what he saw, what he felt, what he did, and now what he says (verse 22), and it's marvelous. "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill," earlier it's called the Areopagus, now it's called Mars Hill. This is this courtroom, "and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious." Now, this is an unfortunate translation in the King James Bible. It's not "too superstitious." What Paul said is, "I perceive that you are very religious," a good perception. You're standing in Athens on Mars Hill, and you see all of these temples and idols. What does he say? He says, "I gather you people are quite religious." They would've said, "Yes, yes. Thank you very much. We are," and he connected with them. He's not in the synagogue speaking to Jews, so he has to connect with these Gentiles where they are at. He said, "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD," think about that. "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." Now, Paul starts to get a little more pointed here and says, "I perceive you're very religious. I was cruising through your town and saw one of your altars. It said, 'To the unknown God.'" Think about that. They had so many gods, and they're false gods. They had so many idols that they thought there might be a god out there that we might miss. "We don't want to offend him. He might send a volcano or earthquake, so let's have the altar to the unknown god. If any god's out there that we didn't build an altar to, we don't want them to get bummed out at us, okay? We want to have all our basis covered." Paul saw that and used it as a point to connect.

We should take note of that evangelization in witnessing to people in that we connect with them where they're at. Maybe we throw out a question, make a comment, or start up a conversation.

I think our witness is going to be a lot more effective if when you approach somebody you first connect with them. You don't just walk right up to somebody and say, "You're going to hell. Get saved. Oh, by the way, my name is John." "Hey, how you doing? Where are you from? What do you do for a living?" You connect with and talk to them. You get to know what's happening and then begin to share the gospel with them. You don't compromise the message, but you contour it to kind of connect with them and who they are and where they're at, but you never compromise or water down the message.

Paul says, "This 'unknown God,' I'm going to declare him to you." If you're taking notes, I want you to catch this. He talks about God in four different areas—four aspects of God. First, he says He's Creator, so God's greatness is addressed (verse 24). He says, "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." This must have blown them away. "Wait a minute! You're trying to tell me that God isn't worshiped with our hands? These idols are no good? God doesn't dwell in temples made with hands?" That's exactly what Paul was saying. Again, we could tarry on this for some time, but the point is that God created all things. God is transcendent, but He also is connected because the heavens and the earth are the work of God's hands. God created the material universe. He starts with these Gentile pagans by talking about God as Creator.

One of the things that makes evangelism today difficult is that people are brought up on the theory of evolution. They're brought up not on the theory of evolution, but they're brought up on what is told the "fact" of evolution. Evolution is not a fact, it's a theory; and it's a theory with a lot of holes and a lot of problems. You don't have to be that intellectual to realize that something cannot come from nothing; and there's something, and it come from something, and there had to be a great cause for this amazing affect, right? So, we just come up with this idea that there was an explosion. There was a big bang. Scientists do believe today that the creation, the cosmos, had a beginning, which is what the Bible says, by the way. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." For years they thought that the earth was just eternal, that it always existed and it just evolved; but now they realize that there was a beginning. They call it the big bang, and they don't know what caused the bang or what banged on the big bang, but it was a big bang. The next thing you know, there was a little horny toad or a polliwog and it had a freckle. The sun hit the freckle and POOF! an eye came out and then two eyes popped out and then two arms popped out. A Rolex watch appeared on his wrist and you have mankind, you know.

I know I'm being a little silly here, but it's not scientific. It's not logical that just all of the sudden there was nothing and all of the sudden there was something. Well, they mock that idea. They say, "Well, you Christians just believe that God has always been. Where did God come from?" Here's the answer: God didn't come from anywhere. Because He is God, He is eternal, okay? Nobody created God—He wouldn't be God if He was created. He's eternal and self-existent. You either believe in eternal matter of some shape or form, or you believe in an eternal God of some shape and form. I think it takes a lot more faith to believe that there's eternal matter without a divine mind behind the creation of the cosmos than to believe that there's an eternal, transcendent, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God that created this world. So, Paul starts

with creation. Many times today, when we're going to reach people around us, we need to be able to give them an answer why we believe God created the heavens and the earth and that evolution is not true.

Then Paul moves to God as Provider—Creator and then Provider. Notice verse 25. 'Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.' God doesn't need anything. This is another amazing verse. God doesn't need us. Does that surprise you? Sometimes preachers will say, "God needs your money." "Really? Whoa! He's in trouble because I'm broke." Can you imagine God needing our money? God doesn't even need our worship. God doesn't need you to go to church—you need to go to church to worship God. God doesn't need anything, "he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." So, we go from He is Creator—God's greatness—to He is Provider—God's goodness.

Thirdly, He is Ruler, God's government. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men," the Greeks thought that they were a superior race. They thought all other races were inferior, and they actually sought to perfect man and deify man. Paul says, "No." "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." So, He's the God of history, and He's the God of geography. It says in verse 27, "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," He's also the God who is near—God of history, God of geography, and the God who is near. The Epicureans believed He was outside of anything man could connect with.

You think of Christianity, Christianity doesn't teach that we are God or the trees are God or the earth is God. It doesn't teach that God is just transcendent, but it means that the Word became flesh. We teach that God became a man and dwelt among us. God came down to His creation and reached out to us in the redemption of Jesus Christ. He was the God-man.

Verse 28 says, "For in him," that is, God, "we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." Again, I don't want to get sidetracked, but I've heard Oprah Winfrey say that her favorite verse in the Bible is verse 28. By the way, when Oprah Winfrey quotes her favorite verse in the Bible, you can bet that she quotes it out of context and she hasn't properly interpreted or understood it. She thinks that I'm God, you're God, we're God, and God's everything; God's in me, and God's in you. She's basically an Epicurean or she's a Stoick. She's bought this philosophy, and she's actually quoting the Greek poets, is what she's quoting in the context. Now, Paul does agree that we are of His offspring, but only in the sense that we're made in the image of God. We're created in God's image and God's likeness, but when it says, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being," it means that God sustains, helps, and strengthens us. It doesn't mean we are God. It means God is our helper, strength, sustainer, and He does give to all life, and breath, and help in all things.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God," in that we're made in God's image, "we ought

not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Lastly, He is Savior, which speaks of God's grace, "And the times of this ignorance," Paul is still preaching, "God winked at; but now commandeth all men," all people, "every where to repent." Notice, God's commanding us to repent. If God commands us to repent, and if we don't repent, then we're breaking God's commandments. It's disobedience. Verse 31, "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." Again, I realize that I probably should've taken this to two weeks because some of you are going, "Yes! Yes, you should've." Some of you are saying, "That's the only thing I agree with tonight." I'm trying to give you a big picture. I'm trying to give you the survey. If I go too slow on Wednesday nights, we'll never get through the book of Acts. My last Acts study will be my retirement from church.

Here he is. Paul's preaching saying, "He's not only the Creator, but He is the Savior." God isn't only transcendent, but God has come down in the form of a man, in likeness of a man...or not likeness of men, in essence, a man, a sinless Man, in the person of Jesus Christ. Notice that he speaks of repenting because of the day of judgment in verse 31. Do you know that God actually has a day set for judgment? God actually has a day of judgment. There is a day of judgment coming, but you know what people do? They mock that idea. They mock the idea. Well, they did that, too, when God sent a flood. Noah was building an ark...have you ever heard the story of Noah and the ark? It's not just a cute little story for decorating your kid's nursery. Which, by the way, I think that's kind of strange we decorate little children's nurseries, it's about the judgment of God. You put Noah's ark in your little kid's room, "Sleep well tonight, little Johnny. God destroyed the whole earth by a flood, but good night. See you in the morning."

You know what? It actually happened. I know that sounds kind of elementary, but I want you to think about it. It actually happened! God actually destroyed all living things on the earth. He saved the animals, and He saved Noah and his family, but He destroyed the whole world. People mock. They say, "Oh, Jesus isn't coming again." Well, they mocked Noah, too. They said, "It's not gonna rain. It's not gonna flood," but it did, and God destroyed the earth. You say, "Well, God sent a rainbow. He promised He wouldn't do it again." He promised He wouldn't flood the world, but He didn't say He wouldn't burn the world. It's going to be destroyed by fire. The elements will melt with a fervent heat, and God's going to come in judgment.

There's coming a day when Jesus Christ will sit upon the Great White Throne as it declares in the book of Revelation, and God has proven that Jesus will be the Judge of all mankind in that He raised Him from the dead. You know, we talk about Easter and the resurrection and the glorious hope of eternal life, but did you know the resurrection of Jesus Christ also guarantees the judgment of the wicked, the unbeliever, and the non-Christian? You reject Jesus, one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. You either bow your knee now, and it means salvation; or you bow your knee then, and it means your condemnation. So, proof of God's judgment, the resurrection (verse 31) from the dead.

Notice, in closing, the three responses (verse 32). "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." There's three responses: those who mocked (verse 32), those who procrastinated, "we will hear thee again of this matter," and (verse 34) those who believed. My question, in closing, tonight is what category are you in? Are you going to mock and say, "I don't believe it. I don't believe that God came down in the Person of Jesus Christ and He died for my sins and rose from the dead," and you mock that idea. Do you know what the Bible says? The Bible says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You can't mock God and the things of God, and not expect to face the certain judgment of God.

You say, "Well, I don't really want to mock it, but I'm not ready. I just want to postpone my decision. I'm undecided." To be undecided is to be decided. To say, "I'm not ready to believe in Jesus or trust in Jesus," then you're rejecting Jesus because He actually says that He's at your heart door knocking, and if you hear His voice and open the door, He'll come in. The Bible says now is the acceptance time; today is the day of salvation. It says if you hear God's voice, don't harden your heart. Tonight, if you're not a Christian, maybe you...I don't know how a non-Christian can come in on a Wednesday night, but it happens. If you've come in tonight, or you've been coming on Sunday and came tonight or maybe you're just listening to this sermon but you haven't trusted Jesus Christ, that's what you have to do to become a Christian. He commands everyone to repent. It means that you turn from your sin and trust Jesus as your Savior. You don't go to heaven by being good. You go to heaven by trusting Jesus. Don't put it off because that's the third response, they believe. It means they put their faith in Christ. They trusted Him. They believed in Him. Have you trusted Jesus tonight? Are you taking His hand and put your faith in Him? "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Let's pray.