

Faithful Evangelism, Part 2

Acts 17:24-34

September 13, 2015

Today, go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Acts 17. Today, we're getting back into our little two-part message on evangelism. We just wanted to jump into that subject of evangelism last week and this week because we know so many students are going back to school, routines are getting back into fall routines and we have an opportunity, again, to remind ourselves of what we're here to do on earth. We're not here just to fellowship together, just to enjoy the time with each other, even though that is very, very precious. The church is a little slice of heaven on earth. But it is, you know, it's, it's filled with us, right? Sinners still in our bodies and we need to be redeemed fully and come into the full consummation of the sons of God. And we'll do that in heaven.

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So everything we do here, singing, fellowship, learning, teaching, everything is going to be so much better in heaven without the presence of sin, right? Here on earth, we can do something that we cannot do in heaven and that's evangelize lost sinners. So we need to be about doing that. And that's why we want to take a little bit of a break from Luke as we get into the fall season. And just remind ourselves of what it is we're here to do and really, how to go about doing it.

So we got into Acts 17 to see Paul's example of evangelism lived out right there in Acts 17, and in a pretty hostile environment. I'd imagine that the world, in your world probably, is getting more and more hostile toward Christianity and hostile toward you. If you're faithful, people are not going to like that. They don't like the Christ you represent; they don't like the God you represent. And so hostility will come your way when you live out your Christian life and when you try to speak accurately about the things of Scripture. So we want to encourage you and strengthen you in the task of evangelism through just this little series on evangelism.

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When Paul came to Athens, God gave him, as we see there, a pretty special witnessing opportunity up on Mars Hill, at the Areopagus, which was kind of like the intellectual center of the Greco-Roman world. Athens represented history, centuries of philosophical thought. We have a lot to learn from what Paul encountered there. Kenichi Akagi came up to me after I finished preaching last Sunday and he just told me how his father had used Acts 17 in a very immediate and practical way to evangelism some fellow Japanese businessmen he was traveling with. They were traveling together on a business trip in, in Europe and here's, here's how Kenichi described it. I asked him to jot it down, send it to me and I told him I'd relay this to you.

He said this, "Among other places, they," that is his father and the Japanese businessmen he was traveling with. "Among other places they visited Athens for their sightseeing. He said the other businessmen were marveling at the ancient buildings and statues they were seeing and he," that is Kenichi's father, "he said to them, 'These are just idols.' And my father took his little Bible and read Acts 17:16-31 to them. And he told them that that was the exact place where Paul was when he spoke the words in those verses. Emphatically he said, 'This is the place,

and these are the verses that were written about it.' I told my father that it was wonderful that he had an opportunity to explain what the Bible said about idols to the other businessmen. I was touched by his boldness about his faith in front of the other businessmen. I was also wondering how his statement would impact these men's lives in the future as they thought about the millions of idols people worship all over Japan. Acts 17:16-31 are very special verses to me as I remember my father."

Kenichi, thank you for sharing that with us. Your father's testimony still speaks, doesn't it? Just like the Apostle Paul, Kenichi's father was zealous to see the true God worshiped. Just like Paul, he loved lost sinners. And he did not want to see them enslaved by idolatry. Like Paul, he was provoked and troubled by what he saw there. He was not thrilled with the idols. He wasn't like a sightseeing tourist. He was troubled, provoked. And it motivated him to evangelize those fellow businessmen.

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Faithful evangelism begins with the proper motivation, which is the first thing we saw in Paul's encounter with, in Athens there, our first point last week. We also understand the impossibility of the task. We cannot bring dead people to life. We can't do that. As we said last week, the Athenian philosophers, they were so spiritually blind that they interpreted Paul's clear testimony about Jesus and the resurrection as Paul adding two separate gods to their pantheon, Jesus and Anastasis. It's ridiculous. The multitude of idols throughout Athens testified to their absolute blindness and confusion. They didn't know where to direct their worship. They even admit their ignorance by erecting an altar to an unknown God.

And that's Paul's in right there. That's where he jumps in to tell them about the common ground that he shares with them. Those Athenian philosophers, even fellow Jews, ignorant superstitious masses around the entire Roman Empire, they all shared the same common ground. And that is this: God designed human beings to worship. They all worship. That's the common ground that you and I share with unbelievers today, as well. All are worshipers. We are creatures. As such, we are worshipers. We

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are created in God's image and we're created to worship him. Sin has distorted that, it's perverted that and so we direct our worship elsewhere, but it's an objective, undeniable testimony to our creatureliness. It points us all to the God who created us.

Let's pick up the story there at verse 22, Acts 17:22. Paul's standing in the midst of the Areopagus and he said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious," again, not a compliment, just a fact. "For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Let's stop there for a second. The Athenians have already acknowledged the fact of God's existence. That God exists is not the question. For them it's a question of what god exists. Who is this unknown god? What is he like?

You say, well, that's not our problem today. Today's intellectual elite deny not just the whatness of God, who he is, what he is, they deny the thatness of God. They say, there is no

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God. We can't even get to the whatness of God until we establish the thatness of God, that he exists. Listen, today's unbelieving intellectuals are just like yesterday's unbelieving intellectuals. They're still blind, they're still full of pride and they still share the same common ground as being creatures created in God's image. So put out of your mind that they are more evolutionarily advanced than their predecessors. If anything, philosophy has devolved since Paul's day.

You just need to demonstrate the folly of whatever they assume to be true. Show them. That is our task in apologetics these days, to expose, in as kind of way as possible, but still to expose the folly of atheism. Both Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, they're nearly parallel to one another. Both begin this way, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" So when we hear the folly of unbelief, whether it's atheism, secularism, paganism, humanism, any other kind of "ism," if it's unbelief, it's folly. It's foolishness.

And we need to confront folly. We need to expose it for what it is. Proverbs 26:5 says, "Answer a fool according to his folly

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lest he be wise in his own eyes." In other words, answer a fool as his folly deserves, expose his folly. It is not wise; it is not intelligent to deny God. It's stupid. Show the atheist, the secularist, the agnostic, tell them how foolish it is, how unscientific it is, for instance, to claim that everything spontaneously self-generated out of nothing. How does that happen? How do we get all of this from absolutely nothing? That's silly. It's completely unscientific.

They talk about the eternality of matter, just always existed. Well then, why would say that intelligence comes from nonintelligence? Nothing comes from something. Complexity comes from that kind of simplicity. No, that's completely unscientific. You don't see that in a lab. You don't see that in the experiments. Why would you apply that to your metaphysics?

Ask your philosophy professors, ask your ethics professors, ask your social science professors, have them explain to you where innate moral standards come from. Ask them to defend their right to make moral judgments about you, which they make all the time. For example, whenever you hear the words, should, or ought,

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you're hearing moral language. For example, they say, Christians should stop holding to an ancient book of myths and opinions. They ought to get with the moral revolution. Get with the program and support the gay marriage revolution. Should? Ought? Really? Why should we? Why should we? What is the moral reason we ought to do anything at all?

Listen, people may deny, university professors, public intellectuals, scientists, whomever, people may deny the existence of an objective absolute transcendent moral standard. They may claim such a thing doesn't exist, but they do not live that way, do they? Try grabbing their wallet and walking away. Morality all of sudden becomes an issue, doesn't it? Try driving away in their car and just yell back behind you, in my culture taking your stuff and making it mine isn't wrong. Listen, no one lives as if morality is subjective, as if it's all relative. They reveal that every time they use words like, hey, you shouldn't do that. You ought to do thus and such.

According to God's design, we are all moral creatures. And we all live and think instinctively in our own hearts according to

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the moral code that God preprogramed into our souls. Romans 2:14-15, it says, "When Gentiles, who do not have the law," that is talking about the law of Moses. "When Gentiles, who don't have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they're a law unto themselves, even though they don't have the law. They should that the work of law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them."

You say, I can't tell that they have law. I can't tell, they look very honest and open to me. But you know what, you can't see their conscience. God can. You know what he told us right here in Romans chapter 2? He says, I can see their conscience and you know what it tells me? It tells me they're either accusing them or defending them based on the law written on their hearts. You can't see that. I can't see that. God can and he's written it down in a book. You believe it? Do you believe that it's written on their hearts? Do you believe that you when you speak the truth that you have an ally in the heart of an unbeliever?

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It's called the law of God written on their heart. It's called the conscience that either excuses them or defends them, according to what you've said, according to the truth. It's true. It's powerful. When we preach the Gospel to people, man, it's, it's unfair. It's unfair because we have their conscience on our side. We have the law of God in their hearts on our side. We have the truth on our side. We have the immortal God on our side, and we have the Holy Spirit who's speaking through us to them and the Holy Spirit who's convicting them inside. It's completely unfair, but I'm okay with that. I don't know about you.

Listen, that passage, Romans chapter 2, tells us why in every culture around the world murder is wrong, adultery is wrong, taking what belongs to your neighbor, all wrong. People say, oh, that's just social convention. That's just societies getting together and figuring out what kind of works for them and they've evolved that way. And then they kind of agree that that's kind of the social convention for their culture. But it may be different in another culture. One culture ought not to judge another culture.

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Really? So you're going to tell me that Hitler, it's okay to do what he did? You tell me Stalin, 20 million people? Mao Tse-tung, 70 million people, who knows! Atheistic regimes that destroy people, you're going to tell me that that's just their culture? I don't think so. We have a need to make moral judgments. Our hearts, though sinful and fallen, our law codes, though they're flawed and distorted, they testify to the existence of God's transcendent, universally binding moral law. And every time an atheist tells us, you shouldn't believe in God, he's testifying to the God he denies by using moral language that God programmed him to use. He can't help it.

So never be intimidated for one second by these rebellious creatures. They need salvation and you and I understand that. We've been converted by a holy God, who loved us enough to tell us the truth and expose our folly. I'm so grateful he did that to me, aren't you grateful he did that to you? They need salvation. They need the grace of God's marvelous light. They need the moving of his merciful spirit to open their eyes so they can see his truth. Again, folks, 1 Peter 3:15, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Be prepared to give an answer." Be

obedient to speak when the Lord gives you opportunity and then leave the results to the Holy Spirit.

That's exactly what Paul did. His evangelism in the Athenian marketplace, it caused a stir. It caught some attention.

Epicurean and Stoic philosophers escorted him to the Areopagus. They ascended Mars Hill and Paul took the opportunity there, in their midst, in hostile territory to teach them about the God who created them. I say, hostile territory, as if Paul was surrounded. It was hostile for the Athenian philosophers. They were surrounded by the creation that God made, and they were confronted with the Almighty Holy Spirit speaking through the Apostle Paul.

It was hostile territory for those guys. They had to be a tad uncomfortable when they'd realized they brought him right into their midst. He shined light into their blind eyes. He spoke God-exalting, man-humblng truths to their proud hearts. He exposed them to the God that they'd been suppressing all their lives in unrighteousness. He preached the Gospel.

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Like Paul, we must rely on the God of the impossible to convert sinners. And we have to preach the message he has given us to preach, and only that message. We don't rely on our charm. We don't rely on our friendliness, our persuasiveness, the power of our great arguments. We preach an accurate Gospel, faithful to God's whole message so the Holy Spirit can use the means of his word to convert dead sinners and raise them to new life.

That's exactly what we see Paul doing here. Having declared the thatness of God, that God is, he now proclaims the whatness of God. He proclaims what, or more properly, he proclaims who God is. That's the bulk of this account. It's focused on Paul's message. This is the fourth point in the outline that we started last week.

Faithful evangelism, it's, writ, there in your bulletin. Faithful evangelism is driven, number one, by the proper motivation. Number two, it recognizes an impossible task. Number three, it's conducted in a gracious manner, what we called humble boldness, which is really just another term for meekness.

Fourth point: Faithful evangelism requires us to preach the biblical message, the biblical message.

Faithful evangelism means we treat, we, we teach people a rudimentary theology, the basics. We can't make any assumptions about what people think they know about God, even if they use the same terms as we do. That's true even if they come from a church background. Perhaps, especially if they come from a church background. A clear and accurate Gospel is hardly ever preached or even recognized in many churches today. The light has been hidden. The salt has lost its savor. And that has an effect on the wider culture. Increasingly we're living in a day that's become more and more like the First Century, in which people were completely ignorant of, bibl, biblical truth.

So, like in Paul's day, like he did here, we also need to go back to the beginning. We need to start with God the sovereign creator and sustainer of all things and that takes us back to proclaim the truths of Genesis. What a beloved book that is. Take a look at verse 24-28. It starts out there, Paul's

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speaking. He says, "What you worship in ignorance, I'm going to proclaim to you," and here he goes right here.

"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not very far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" Stop there.

In God, all creatures live and move and have our being. God is the context in which we live. God provides the air that we breathe. He provides bodies that can process the food that he gives us. God is our environment. And he's the environment of the unbeliever, too. The unbeliever rejects him. The unbeliever uses his good gifts to rebel against him. It's like a little kid

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who wants to rebel against his father, but he needs to wait until his father is sitting down so he can sit on his lap in order to slap him in the face. He can't reach. So he uses his father's accommodation to rebel.

It would require another sermon or two to unpack this short paragraph in great, in any of its rich detail, but we'll just cover a few things here. What you need to see is that Paul has taught these Athenian philosophers a very, very basic theology. This is what all Christians believe and affirm about God, even if they don't know the fulness of each proposition. In fact, this is the theology proper that we're teaching to our children in Sunday School every single week. Keep in mind, for the crème de la crème of the Greco-Roman world, this is new news to them. Though God has hardwired their souls to recognize the truth of what Paul's teaching them, they had never been exposed to the truth in that kind of clarity. All their reasoning had been conducted in the darkness of unbelief and it did not bring them here. Same thing with those you encounter today. This is new news to them.

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Now, let's get a, just a brief exposure to what Paul is telling them here, see what kind of impact this has on the God-suppressing mind. Now let me just give you a basic division here in verses 24-28 or, as we go on. We're going to look at verses 24-26, he teaches them really a theology proper, just theology about God, who God is. In verses 27-29, he unpacks a few implications of that theology. Notice the use of the words ought and should in that section. And then he, in verses 30-31, he presses them for a verdict, call them to repentance.

That's what the biblical message of faithful evangelism involves: teaching, implications, and exhortation. You have to teach them. Then you have to show them the implications of that and then you have to exhort them to repentance. If you're not doing all three of those things, then you may not be evangelizing.

Let's start in verse 24 with the teaching. The teaching. "The God who made the world and everything in it." God is the creator, right? He's the creator; man's the creature. And that

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simple fact implies a whole lot, folks, a whole lot. As creator, God is the source; man is derivative. God is infinite and unlimited; man is finite and limited. God is all-powerful; man is rather small, isn't he? When we start with the God the creator, rather be, rather than becoming proud in our knowledge, rather than becoming proud in our might and our strength, our accomplishments, we acknowledge, along with King David, Psalm 8, verses 3-4, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you're mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?"

We're awestruck by God's power. We're in awe at the magnitude of his being. He, who is above and beyond the stars, he, who is the creator of time and space and everything that fills space, folks, that's what's at stake in the battle for the beginning. In protecting the literal interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis, we cannot hedge on that at all.

Time 0:32 And watch where you're sending your kids to college because the vast majority of Christian colleges and seminaries

have abdicated on that point, compromising with philosophically, untenable, socially destructive theories of evolution. The glory of God is at stake here, as well as the entire fabric of what God revealed, the redemption that he accomplished. We can never budge one iota on the clear, plain meaning of Scripture in Genesis. But that's another sermon.

Notice the next phrase in verse 24. "The God who made the world and everything it in, being," what that's word? "Lord," right? "Being Lord of heaven and earth." He's Lord. God is absolutely sovereign. And not just over man, but over all spirits, angelic, as well as human. God is not one among a pantheon of deities. He does not share his glory. He's sovereign over all, Lord of heaven and earth. Lord of angels and demons. Lord of kings and princes. Lord of governments and armies. He's Lord over the massive humanity and over every individual human being, as well.

Not only that, but as the creator of all, as Lord over all, look at verses 24-25, "God does not live in temples made by man." Obviously! "Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath

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and everything." God is immaterial spirit. He's unbound and limitless. He's uncontained and infinite. And that means his Lordship extends everywhere his spirit extends, which is absolutely everywhere, including the immaterial parts, if I could put it that way, the immaterial things of individual men and women, like their thoughts, their emotions, their attitudes, their motives. He's sovereign over that, too. He's sovereign over all flesh and spirit, material and immaterial, as well.

Man's spirit is contained within his flesh, bound within the limitations of space and time. And since his very existence comes from God, his, since his soul was created by God, man is utterly dependent on God for everything. He gives nothing to man, to God to other men. He gives nothing. He's the originator of nothing. He receives everything.

God is not like man at all. God is self-existent. He is self-sustaining. God is the giver. He's the source of all existence. He's the source of all sustenance. He has no need, he has no weakness, no unfulfilled desires. He is the God, verse 26, "who made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the

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face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place." Whereas God is infinite and limitless, man is finite and limited. He's hemmed in by the God who "determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling." He's contained.

God, as you see here, he's the God of history. He's the God who determines geography. Right now, the face of the Middle East is undergoing drastic change. The lines are being redrawn. Isis is carving out a territory for itself, completely ignoring the boundaries of so-called sovereign states like Iraq and Syria. There's been massive Muslim migration into Europe, which is, and that Muslim religion, it's redefining the religion, the culture of that entire continent. Are the Muslims winning the centuries-old war against European crusaders? Time will tell.

But just remember, Isis is not sovereign. That group is simply moving into the boundaries that God has prescribed for whatever purpose he has predetermined. Like the rest of the Muslim world, they are nothing more than tools of God's judgment. They are unwittingly carrying out his sovereign design, like the Babylonians before them. God governs the earth by his good and wise providence. And all the boundaries are set by him. All the

movements of history are set by him. Everything is set and accomplishing his ultimate ends. That includes the events of history. It includes the lines of the map. It includes the shifting sands of world power. It includes the thrones of the world, those in seats of power. All those things are governed by this providence, according to the dictates of his sovereign will, which is always good, always right.

Why did God order his created world in such a way? Why does he limit man? Why does he set boundaries around mankind, pointing us continually to his sovereign authority? Is this a way to make man gravel, to crush man in the dust and rub man's nose in his creaturely limitations? Not at all. Not at all. Paul knew that introducing the Athenians to God as sovereign creator, as provider and sustainer, as all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present, this was a foundational truth to lead them to the knowledge of salvation. It's not about crushing man, except to humble him and point him to heaven. They needed to be humbled under the might and the power of God before they'd ever look up to see that they need him.

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Unbelievers, all of us really, but especially as we're talking about evangelism, unbelievers need to see and reckon with the fact that man's existence, it's derived, first from God, but most immediately it's derived from those who've preceded us. Right? All those who preceded us are also derived from those who preceded them, all the way back to the very first man, Adam. The very first human being that God created, "God made," as it says there, "Made us all from one man."

Again, another reason why what we're teaching here is not compatible with evolutionary theory. God made from, made us all from one man. And don't miss the fact that it is that first man who failed. He fell in the Garden of Eden, and he plunged his entire progeny, all of his offspring, that's us, he plunged us all into sin and corruption. You know what? God is the one who bound the fate of all mankind to Adam. Why did he do that? To point us to our need for a redeemer. That's what this is all about.

"As it's written," 1 Corinthians 15:45, "'The first man Adam became a living being,' the last Adam became a life-giving

spirit.” It wasn’t about Adam. It was about Christ, the last Adam. From the very beginning, it’s not been about the first man Adam. It’s been about the last Adam, Christ, the life-giving spirit. Look, people need to see the limitations of their existence. They need to see that their derivation from fallen humanity and here, at this point, is where Paul starts to unpack the implications of his teaching.

So he’s taught them something about God and themselves. Now he’s teaching them the implications. Notice verse 27. Like I said, the first hint of moral implication comes in that little word, *should*, *should*. God made all things this way. Why? “That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he’s not actually far from each one of us, for, ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” That right there, folks, is the language of moral obligation, that they *should* seek God.

Paul has turned the corner from the facts of theology to the implications of theology. It’s not enough just to know these

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truths. Its not enough just to ascent to them intellectually as true and valid facts. God's truth obligates us to live by that truth, to submit to the God who's revealed himself through his creation and providence, but also through his revealed word. Notice, first of all, Paul informs them of their responsibility to seek God. In light of who God is, in light of how he's ordered the universe, especially in light of how he has done everything for them to sustain them, they're faced with the moral obligation to seek him.

That was Paul's point, as well, in Romans chapter 1:19-21. God holds the entire human race responsible for knowing him. It says there in that chapter, "For what can be known about God is plain to them." They see it. It's plain, because God has shown it to them. "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So that," what? They're without excuse. "They're without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him." Moral obligation. We're responsible to honor God. We're responsible to give thanks.

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That's moral obligation number one, men and women should seek God. They should worship him, honoring him as the God that he is, praising him with thanksgiving. The very existence of God for who he is demands the worship of God. And that, folks, is why atheists deny him. That is why evolutionists want to make him unnecessary. As we evangelize, we cannot let them get away with that.

Notice also verse 29. Mankind is morally obligated, morally responsible not to worship idols. That's moral obligation number two. It's really the flipside of the first one. God demands exclusive worship. Verse 29, "Being then God's offspring, we ought not," there again, moral language. "We ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man." When Paul says that, all he needs to do, I mean, he's standing in Athens. It's filled with idols. An idol on every corner. It's all around him. The point's not lost on these Athenian philosophers.

This is familiar language to us, isn't it? Paul is informing these Gentiles what God had told the Israelites about 1500 years

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earlier. Earlier than Socrates, earlier than Plato, earlier than Aristotle. This is the same language of Exodus 20:2-5, the Ten Commandments. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that's in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God."

There's not, there's not one standard for Israel and another standard for the Gentile nations. It's the same standard, the same moral obligations for all mankind. These truths may have been clearer for Israel than for the Gentiles. That was the blessing of being God's chosen nation. Paul said, Romans 9:4, "They are the Israelites, to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises." Folks, that was no small blessing. It was huge. Their minds clicked into gear into place because they understood the God who made them. But the standard has always been the same for all. Idolatry in any form to any degree denies God the right to exclusive worship from his creatures. It's not only our moral

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responsibility to worship God, but to worship him exclusively, to worship him only.

All idolatry is disallowed by verse 29, not just the pagan variety of the First Century, but also the seemingly sophisticated modern gods of today, right? Progress, development, science, global commerce, political power, military might, anything that we might honor or admire or trust in, anything that rivals God, that is the heart of idolatry. I don't care if it's a democratic form of idolatry or a republican form of idolatry. I don't care if you're on the left side of the aisle or the right. You're all listening to the same talk radio, just different perspectives. And listen, it's idolatry, if you're trusting in that, if you're hoping in that more than God. If an election can ruin your peace, you might be committing idolatry.

Mankind should seek God. Mankind ought not to worship idols. Mankind ought not to think like God is anything like created objects of "gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of men." Since God created man's mind, since God

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created man's ability to imagine, nothing formed in the imagination of man is worthy of worship. You can't come up with anything better than God.

Notice this, what has Paul pointed out here? What's just, what's just happened? If the Athenians, these Epicureans, Stoics, all the rest, if they're not worshiping the true God, and according to verse 27, they should, and if they have been worshiping idols, and according to verse 29, they ought not to do that, they ought not even to think that way; well what has Paul just done? He has exposed the fact that they are sinners. He has just drawn a bead on their guilt before a holy God. Based on the moral obligation they have to worship the God who created them, the one who sustains them, and has taken care of them, who has shown his love and grace toward them. He's just exposed the fact that they've sinned against him. They've offended him. That's the implication of the theology he just taught.

So having taught them about God, having unpacked the moral implications of his teaching, Paul presses them for a verdict. He presses them to a decision. He exhorts them to repent. Look

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at verse 30. "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." Okay, does that mean Filipino people? Yeah. Does that mean Chinese people? Yeah. Does that mean Russian people? Yeah. What about Europeans? Yep, them too. What about Africans? Yes. What about Americans, South Americans, Canadians even, eh? Yes, all of them. All of them are to repent because God has the right to wipe out mankind in his wrath for one little seeming peccadillo of a sin, like a white lie. Yeah, he can wipe us out for that. Even more so, for idolatry. Even more so for not showing gratitude.

In fact, not only does he have the right to do that, he's bound by his holy and righteous nature to judge all sin and every sin. Instead, though, for the Gentile nations, God has shown remarkable patience. He's continued to demonstrate mercy and kindness and common grace. He has continued to this very point to overlook and instead of wrath, he's given them food to eat. He's given them air to breathe. He's given them marriages to rejoice in. Babies to kiss. All the provision of God's goodness in creation and in providence. Man owes God his exclusive worship, his absolute allegiance, his love and devotion, his sincere and profound gratitude.

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But Romans 1:21, "The didn't honor him as God or give thanks to him." Hmm. He's been merciful to overlook past ignorance, "but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." Now. Why now? Because of Jesus Christ. Look at that word repentance. He's calling everyone to repent. It's a very important part of the Gospel message. It's essential, we can even say, it's not the Gospel without calling people to repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance, Matthew 3:2, saying, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus preached repentance. He came, very first words, Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Peter preached repentance on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:28, he said, "Repent, and be baptized every single one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

Paul, throughout his ministry and the main message of his ministry, both to Jews and to Gentiles was a message of repentance. Acts 26:20, he said his message, he reports that his own message is, this is how he summarized it is that, "They should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance." Is that what you do? Do you call people to repentance? Do we expect people to perform deeds in keeping with

repentance? We should. Preaching repentance is not only biblical, it is required if we are to be faithful to the true message of the Gospel.

So what does repentance mean? The word, *repent*, is the word *metanoeo*. *Metanoeo*, literally, to change the mind. Mind, is the word *noe*. We're not talking about a flippant, superficial change of mind. I wanted chocolate ice cream, but I've changed my mind. I want vanilla, now. That's not really what we're talking about. We're talking about something much, much deeper. But even in that illustration of chocolate versus vanilla, what does the change of mind indicate? You don't buy chocolate and you buy vanilla, right? The change of mind affects your actions.

So repentance, in this sense, is what we might call a paradigm shift. It's a radical break with a former way of thinking, to convert, to think entirely in an entirely different way. And this change of mind goes deep. It goes all the way down into the heart to decision-making central so that all life decisions are run through the grid of this new direction. Repentance is a radical change of affections. Forsaking all idolatry, like Paul

said about the, fir, the Thessalonians. Forsaking all idolatry to worship and serve the living God.

That's why we understand biblically that faith and repentance are gifts of God. They flow out of divine regeneration by the Spirit of God. Like faith, repentance is not generated by a dead sinner, someone who's a corpse. It requires the quickening power of the Holy Spirit. And that's these Athenian philosophers. That's what they're facing. Having heard the truth, they're not allowed to stay the same. They're no longer ignorant; they're informed, and they must repent. They must abandon their man-centered philosophies and pursue an entirely new direction in their thought life, one of worship and gratitude to God. And you know what? That's going to change their out, external actions. It's going to change their associations. It's going to change what they say. It's going to change the things that they participate in, isn't it?

Two more things I'd like you to see in Paul's Gospel presentation here. Not only do we preach an accurate theology and draw out the implications, call people to repent, well we

also need to tell people about judgment and mercy. Judgment and mercy. What we proclaim is weighty. And the message carries consequences based on whether a person rejects or accepts that message. There's inescapable wrath for those who refuse to repent and there's unassailable mercy for those who embrace repentance.

Look at verse 30 again. "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given us assurance, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." God will judge the world in righteousness. That is to say, no favoritism, no exceptions, all will be weighed in the scales of his holy law and all will be found wanting. There are consequences in continuing toward judgment day without repentance. That's a warning.

But notice in the warning, following close on the heels of the warning there is promise. The man God appointed to judge the world? Well, he's the very man, same man that God raised from

the dead. Why is that significant? Well, in the mind of someone hearing this for the very first time, not in the mind of all of us who've kind of been accustomed of hearing this over and over, in the mind of brand-new hearers of this truth, it raises a significant question. Why did the man appointed to judge the world have to be raised from the dead? What killed him in the first place?

That takes us right back to the Gospel, doesn't it? 2

Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake God made him who, who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we in him might become the righteousness of God." Brings us right to the Gospel. Paul had already, Paul had already been teaching the Gospel. It's what they heard earlier in the marketplace that brought him up to the Areopagus. So they'd been hearing him articulate this, but they'd muddled it. They'd confused it.

But look back at verse 30 for a second. You see how Paul has drawn a line in the sand of human history in that verse? He draws the line, "The time of ignorance God has overlooked, but," draw a line, "now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

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What changed? What, what did God overlook in the times of ignorant past, but now calling everyone to repentance? What's different now, that wasn't true then? The answer's right there in verse 31. The crux of Paul's argument is this, "God has given assurance," or you could translate that word, proof. "God has given proof to mankind, to all mankind by raising Jesus from the dead." The resurrection is the indisputable fact of human history that proves everything written on these pages of Scripture.

If the resurrection is not true, folks, eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Let's just turn off the lights here, close the doors, and go party, because none of this is true. Lest you believe I think you should do that, I believe in the resurrection. That's why I'm here. You do, too. That's why we're here. The tomb is empty. And no one has been able to locate the body, except those who saw him walking around after his death by resurrection, after his burial in a tomb. He'd been raised from the dead. There's the body right there, walking around, talking to us, appearing in rooms, comforting us.

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But those with the greatest motive to deny the resurrection of Christ, they were unable to do so. They couldn't find a dead body in the tomb. They couldn't find a dead body hidden anywhere. Even though they had great motivation and resources to find a dead body, they couldn't do it. All they could do is try to silence those who saw him after his resurrection. And those who saw him raised from the dead, those guys were unable to stop talking about the resurrection. They wouldn't even stop talking about it until they were put to death for maintaining that testimony.

Listen, the resurrection is a powerful, irrefutable argument for the truthfulness of Paul's Gospel. Now, in all we have seen, do you notice how Paul has not attempted for one moment on his own to prove anything to these pagans? Do you see his simply declared the truth of it and then called them to repentance? It's as if he expects, as we ought to, he expects that the declaration of the truth is enough.

Theologian John Whitcomb, he's co-author of *The Genesis Flood*, along with Doctor Henry Morris, both of whom you should get to

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know, and their writings. You should read them. Dr. Whitcomb wrote this, quote, "So far from proving the existence of the God of Christianity, Paul simply authoritatively declared him to these men. He declared this God to be the Creator and the Lord of the world and of mankind. He declared the nearness and, thus, the accessibility of God to mankind and the utter ignorance of idolatry. And finally, he announced that this great God will someday judge all men through that resurrected man whom Paul had previously named as Jesus. And therefore, he is now declaring to man that all everywhere should repent." End quote.

Beloved, that's what we all need to do, as well. We just tell the truth that God revealed in his word. We trust that it has the power to convict and change the heart. We trust God by his Spirit to accomplish his sovereign will by means of our obedience to preach the message he's given us. Does that make sense? So what happened? Did the Athenian philosophers fall to their knees and repent before Paul? Was there a mass revival on Mars Hill? Did they turn from intellectual pride, pagan idolatry, put faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Well, for the most part, no they didn't. And that brings us to a final point in this short series, faithful evangelism requires proper

motives, an acknowledgement of the impossibility of our task, which causes us to speak in a gracious manner, and to proclaim an accurate biblical message of Gospel truth. But final point, we need to set realistic expectations. We need to set realistic expectations.

When our message is clear and accurate, get this, the majority will reject our message. And yet, a few will embrace it. Here's the majority response, verses 32-33, "Now when they heard of the resurrection from the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' So Paul went out from their midst." Paul didn't plead with them. He didn't beg. He didn't chase after them. In fact, Paul seemed rather indifferent to their invitation for further discussion. Why?

Well, look, what else needed to be said? If they didn't repent at the clear teaching of the Gospel, why spend any more time with them? Their response, open hostility, patronizing indifference, that was proof-positive that their hearts were committed to their self-rule, committed to their rebellious independence. Further dialogue with them was not necessary. He

wasn't being unkind. He was being wise. In the execution of his apostleship, he was a steward of his time and energy. Those people had everything they needed to repent and turn to Christ and Paul needed to just keep moving.

Now, we're not the Apostle Paul, right? We're not called to apostleship to travel around the entire world and preach this kind of message. Sometimes our evangelism is going to take time. Sometimes it's going to take weeks, months, even years. That's the way with us whom God has planted in one place, at one time and not called us to go, but to stay and go into our community. I'm not saying that all evangelism has to be what we call relational evangelism, but relationships are good ideas. Get to know people and then take them through and teach them. After you've been teaching them, well then show them the implications. After you've shown them the implications, exhort them to repentance.

Sometimes that takes time. Sometimes it takes one conversation. You don't need to limit it. But Paul, he needed to keep moving. And he knew, and we should know, that if we get all of that out,

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we've said what needs to be said. It's not the skill with which we scatter seed, it's the power of the seed. Paul quietly went out of their midst. He had nothing more to say. He simply trusted God to use the truth that he proclaimed to bring him to repentance.

Was that a good thing to trust? Well, some did believe, right? If they believed, well then it was sufficient, wasn't it? It was sufficient to save some. And this account, therefore, closes on a triumphant note. Verse 34, "Some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite," so there's one philosopher. "And a woman named Damaris and others with them." Now this Dionysius and Damaris, they must have been pretty well-known figures. So sometimes, I know 1 Corinthians chapter 1 says, "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble," but there are some. It doesn't say, none mighty, none noble, none wise. Here are some.

When we preach the Gospel accurately, clearly, boldly, God's elect will recognize the truth. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and they come to me." Religion, philosophy, culture,

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history, none of that can hinder God's power to save his people from their sins. That's what we're doing in faithful evangelism. We herald an accurate Gospel, and God, who opens the hearts of those he's chosen, they embrace it by faith. They repent of their sins. They embrace Jesus Christ. That's what God has called us to do. So let's go do it. Amen!

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this time in your word and for encouraging us with this word about evangelism, about being faithful to what we're called to do here on this earth. We ask, Father, that you would help us to be bold and courageous especially in a, in an environment of hostility and intimidation and marginalization. It's even increasing these days. Christians are not at the center of the intellectual conversation, at least in this world. And yet, we are at the heart of it because you have given us your truth. We are finally able, with your revealed word, to think reasonably, to think logically, to think with understanding, to think with wisdom. Please help us to apply that wisdom to our evangelism, make us bold, faithful, and especially joyful and cheerful about the tasks that you've left us here to do. We give all praise and honor and glory to you, Father, because of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.