

## Church – The Beginnings, Part 53

### Paul's Mission to Athens – Part 4

Acts 17:15-34 | 11/05/2017

NEW LIFE FELLOWSHIP

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#### Act 17:15-34

<sup>15</sup> So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. (ASAP)

<sup>16</sup> Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. <sup>17</sup> Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbling man want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them **JESUS** and the **RESURRECTION**.

<sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?" <sup>20</sup> For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." <sup>21</sup> For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

<sup>22</sup> Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; <sup>23</sup> for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing [i.e.: in ignorance], Him I proclaim to you: <sup>24</sup> "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. <sup>25</sup> Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. <sup>26</sup> And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, <sup>27</sup> so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup> for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' <sup>29</sup> Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. <sup>30</sup> Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

<sup>32</sup> And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." <sup>33</sup> So Paul departed from among them. <sup>34</sup> However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. [NKJV]

#### Review from Last Week:

**The altar to the unknown god** related to a real, historically verifiable event in which a plague hit the region of Athens and surrounding regions, etc. The people offered sacrificial offerings and prayers to that the plague would be stopped and the people would be healed. They offered these sacrifices and prayer to all the of their known pagan gods and goddess, but nothing worked – those false gods were and still are – dead, deaf, dumb, and blind – they are not real – and if there is some sort of "spiritual" entity behind them – those entities are demons (fallen angels, etc. – read 1 Cor. chptrs 8 and 10). So, they called upon a "prophet" / "poet" – **Epimenides** – from Crete. He suggested that there is a "god" that they don't know about. So, hungry sheep were released on a very green grassy field – the understanding was, that very hungry sheep will not lie down in the grass when they are this hungry. So, the ones that do lie down, those will be sacrificed on an altar to an unknown god. So, everywhere that happened, they did those sacrifices unto the "unknown god" imploring Him to stop the plague and to heal their people and land. Once the last sheep was sacrificed, the plague stopped,

and people were starting to heal. They attributed this healing to the “unknown god” and kept those altars. 6 centuries later, Paul the apostle saw one of the remaining, crumbling altars to the “unknown god” and used this for his Presentation of the Gospel to him.

That altar to an “unknown god” represented the **IRREFUTABLE REALITY** of the God who Created the Heavens and the Earth. It represented the **IRREFUTABLE REALITY** that God is real and all the pagan gods and goddess are NOT. It represented the **IRREFUTABLE REALITY** that God intervened in Athenian History – they cannot deny its reality of actually happening. . It represented the **IRREFUTABLE REALITY** that God, the one and only creator – **EXISTS** - and that we are accountable to Him. What are some “altars” to the “unknown god” today in our Athenian-like culture?

If you want to know more about this, please, go to <https://wp1.NLFJl.org/319> - last week’s message – to find out more details ...

**This week: Let’s dissect Paul’s Presentation to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-34)**

**The Unknown God ... :**

1. He is **the Creator of the Universe – One God, the Only, True and Living God** (verses 22-25)  
This matches **Genesis chapters 1 & 2** perfectly – by concept and principle – also compare **1 Thess. 1:6-10**  
God is bigger than Temples and does not need us to “serve” Him, etc. → Isaiah 66:1-2
2. He is **One who created humans** (verse 26) → Genesis 1 & 2
3. He caused all humans to spread out – people groups – to have living boundaries. (v. 26 & 27)  
See Genesis 10:1–11:9 (Table of 70 Nations [people groups] and the **Tower of Babel** incident).  
The Tower of Babel, the subsequent spreading of the language groups/people groups all over the world, makes no sense unless we understand the Global Flood of Noah’s day.  
All, ancient people groups, passed down the “story” of the Global Flood, and of Noah’s family being rescued in a boat or some vessel, etc. It is a global, human, memory of a real incident. And, so, in the Tower of Babel incident, as well. We spread out all over the face of the earth after a common event – and took with us, false god worship, temple architecture (ziggurats, pyramids, etc.), and these ancient historical, common, human “memories”.

There was a **purpose** for the Tower of Babel incident (the confusing of the languages):  
“so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him”

Look at a map of the world today. Find a map that is about 100 years old. And go back every 100 years. You will see that the map of the countries, their boundaries have changed over time. That is what Paul is addressing – preappointed times and boundaries of their dwellings. It does not mean that they are fixed – but from time to time they would fluctuate over time. How did they fluctuate? Through wars, conflicts, struggles, etc. All of those kinds of things bring people to the ends of themselves – winner and losers. That is why Christ said – “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ...” [Matt. 5:3] WHY? Because the losers have lost everything “earthly” and have been **humbled** and have come the end of themselves. What they trusted in failed them, so that they should **gripe** for God – to seek the LORD ... (it means as if the lights are turned off and you are groping around in the dark trying to find the door, or the light switch – it is that connotation or hint or picture). God opposes the Proud, but He give GRACE to the Humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). So, when these struggles of boundaries occur, these are Opportunities of God’s Grace to be on display. That is why displaced peoples from wars (true refugees – not the fake ones) ... those folks are the most open to the Gospel, no matter their religious background. Athens, by the way, when Paul was visiting them, was really in that state of being – they were defeated by the Romans – allowed to live, but really “under the thumb” of the Romans. The once proud people of the Grecian Empire were now a defeated reminder of their loss to the Roman conquest. **They have been humbled.**

4. **HE is not FAR from any one of us** – He is Near – He is a breath way (verse 27-28).  
Romans 10:8-13 addresses this – He is a Prayer / Request / a Word – away from us – Just ask.

In this case – Paul does not quote from the Bible – in fact, so far, Paul has not and does not quote from the Bible, at all. He does, however, use Biblical Concepts, Ideas, and Principles in his presentation, here.

“... though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup> for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also **some of your own poets** have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ ...”

He quotes from Arastus of Soli in Tarsus, in Cilicia [*Phaenomena*, 1-5 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C.] and Cleanthes of Assos in Mysia (disciple of Zeno) [*Hymn to Zeus*] - both were Poems dedicated to Zeus. → **Special NOTE:** Paul is **NOT** equivocating Zeus to Yahweh, God of Israel, the Creator of the Universe – but to the **concept of the Creator of the Universe**. Zeus could be used instead of Theos and **interchanged** within the Greek language and writings. Theos was the generic term for God. So, in this case, both Poems Paul synthesized for the concept he quotes from – Paul uses the concept or idea of the Creator – as a common ground – a point of agreement based upon the usage of “Zeus” in those poems.

We know that Paul is attaching Concept to Concept – Idea to Idea – and Principle to Principle – since Paul starts out his speech with **“the altar to an unknown god”** ... so it cannot be Zeus - specifically, since Zeus was one of the gods that they sacrificed to, during that plague 6 centuries earlier and Zeus did not answer. So, the concept of **“Theos”** is being used instead of **“Zeus”** personally and specifically, etc. Also, the next point about: **Idolatry is Not the Answer** – also proves this point that Paul was **not** equivocating Zeus to Yahweh God.

5. **Idolatry is Not the Answer** → **“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising (*imaginings*).”** (verse 29). Since, Paul started his speech using **the Altar to an Unknown god** – part of his point here is that the Athenians should not look to Idols and the false gods – but **turn from them** – and **turn back to the Only True God** (also see 1 Thess. 1:6-10) → We see this **matches-up**, perfectly with **Exodus 20:1-6** →

And God spoke all these words, saying:

<sup>2</sup>“I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

<sup>3</sup> You shall have **no other gods** before Me.

<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself a **carved image** — any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; <sup>5</sup>**you shall not bow down to them nor serve them**. For I, Yahweh your God, am a **jealous** God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, <sup>6</sup>but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

6. **God’s Mercy - God’s Righteous, Holy Judgment – All are called to Repentance ...** (vv. 30-31)

“Truly, these times of ignorance God **overlooked**, but now **COMMANDS ALL MEN EVERYWHERE TO REPENT**, <sup>31</sup> **BECAUSE** He has appointed a day on which He will **JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS** by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

**God’s Mercy** → He’s overlooked (turned a blind eye) to their sins during times of **ignorance**

→ altar to the “unknown god” [agnostos theos] → agnostos → ignorant – “I am unsure about” – “I don’t know” → a-ghostos – when the prefix “a-” is added to a word in the Greek language it means – “instead of” or “opposite of” or “against”. Thus, “agnostic” “agnostos” relates to Ignorance. So, Paul is bringing the “altar to an unknown go” back into his speech and using it in another way. The **TIME is UP** – and **NOW** – the **TRUTH** about who this Unknown god is – has come to Athens – to their ears. That is what Paul is saying, here.

**God’s Righteous Judgment is coming** – a certain day – relates to God Judging mankind’s sin, individual human sin and collectively, all sinners. That Judgment Day is coming because of sin.

**General Call to Repentance** – because of the coming Judgment – and that coming judgment is truly coming – God gave proof – by Raising Jesus from the Dead. The “Man” who is going to be the Judge of the World – God **testified** to us all - giving **proof by raising Him from the Dead**.

**This is a loaded statement.** Lots of concepts/ideas here.

The Declaration of common, world-wide, globally - that all humans, that every individual is called to **REPENT** – and this is based upon **God’s coming Judgement**. Repentance always refers to a **Turning From** and a **Turning To**. We see in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 – that the Thessalonian Gentiles who were pagan idolaters turned from their false gods (idols) and turned to the Living and True God, the Only God – in Christ.

The **implication** of “this Man” being raised from the dead → **implies** that “this Man” was **killed** or **had died**.

Why use “this Man” and not say Jesus the Messiah or Jesus Christ?

Well, originally, that was how Paul was introduced to the Areopagus – “this man seems to be proclaiming foreign deities, because he was proclaiming ‘Jesus’ and ‘the resurrection’”. So, Paul was already introduced as Preaching Jesus and the Resurrection.

Paul is using “this Man” to show both sides of Christ’s nature. For how could a mere “man” be raised from the dead? For how could a mere “man” be the Judge of the whole world? **Repentance is Tied to this “Man”, as well.** The fact of Coming God’s Judgment and of this “Man” who is the Judge. Repentance relates to “why” God’s Righteous Judgment is coming in the first place → **SIN**. Therefore, in that sentence – the **Repentance FROM** and the **Repentance TO** are implied – are built-in → **Repent from SIN** and **TURN to “this Man”** who was already presented as → **Jesus**. Ref.: **1 Timothy 2:5-7** → <sup>5</sup>“For there is **one God** and **one Mediator** between God and men, **the Man, Christ Jesus**, <sup>6</sup> who gave Himself a **ransom** for all, to be **testified** in due time, <sup>7</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the **Gentiles** in faith and truth.”

7. **The Response (vv. 32-34)** → Just like always – folks respond a number of ways that always fits the same pattern.

And when they heard of the **resurrection of the dead**, some **mocked**, while others said, “**We will hear you again on this matter.**” <sup>33</sup> So Paul departed from among them. <sup>34</sup> However, some men **JOINED** him and **BELIEVED**, among them **Dionysius the Areopagite**, a woman named **Damaris**, and **others** with them.

- a. **Some mock or get violent** (the door is shut) – in this case some mocked because they heard of “the Resurrection” of the dead. For the most part – the Grecian Philosophers, and most Greeks would scoff at such a concept as a Resurrection of the Dead – fully resurrected – physically, and spiritually – as Christ was → **Bodily Resurrected**. The Greeks believed in a more “spiritual” resurrection in which one’s spirit or soul would live on “somewhere” after death. The “where” was debatable. The idea of physical resurrection would make them laugh. Just like the Sadducees that Christ debated with – they also did not believe in the Resurrection of the Dead, nor in Angels, or spirits, or demons, etc. They were very similar to the Greeks in this respect. (interesting, huh?)

The Hope of the Resurrection for the Christian is explained well in 1 Cor. 15 (the whole chapter) and it is tied to Christ’s Resurrection – pattern and example, thereof. We have hope, based upon Christ, Himself and His own Resurrection from the Dead. The Greek were hopeless and were ignorant of “Life after Death”.

- b. **More, Please ... “We will hear you again on this matter.”** – There was, still, an **open door** for the Gospel there in Athens. There were some who still have **NOT** made their decision, they need more information, etc. (similar to the Thessalonians & Bereans). This is a very good sign for the Gospel. But, you can’t count your chickens yet, eggs aren’t hatched, yet. Again, the encouragement is → **keep going through the Open Doors** while they are still **Open** to you. **More and More Details** about who God is, who the **Messiah**, **Jesus** is (**Christ Jesus**), etc. His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection and the full implications of **Salvation**, thereof, etc.
- c. **Some joined Paul and believed.** The two mentioned had to be prominent, since they were recorded here: **Dionysius the Areopagite** and a woman **Damaris**. This implies that

is was NOT a “men’s only” philosophy club. But, in some sense, the Athenians were very egalitarian regarding women being a part of such high society functions.  
**BELIEVED:** It meant that they believed: in the sense of being born again, salvation, etc.  
**JOINED:** implied – fully identified with Paul – no embarrassment or fear of fully associating with Paul. They fully identified with Jesus (the Man who is to judge the world in righteousness). “and others” – together with the two who were names, along with “others” – implies a small number of people responded by Believing and Joining as a result of that speech by Paul. This does not mean that the others who wanted to still find out more (in b. , above) would not eventually come to faith in Christ, as well. We know from History that a church was planted there, and continued on, even until today (supposedly). So, a church was planted there, but not a large church, a very small church, a very small beginning.

8. **The Response Paul had will be similar in our Culture, since our Culture is very much like Athens, Now ... so instead of having Antioch Church Planting Envy ... let’s just spread the Gospel the best we can, faithfully – as Paul did – regardless of the response. Don’s lose heart.**

No folks seem to have “Athens Church Planting Envy” when it comes to Church Planting.  
All seem to have Jerusalem Church Planting Envy  
or Antioch Church Planting Envy ...  
or ... in which great multitudes came to Christ ...  
But there in Athens, Paul, did not see that kind of “Huge” Response like he did in other places.  
**Yet, he did not give up.**

**Follow-up – Deeper Study → go to: <https://NLFJI.org/PaulAthens>**