

# Now What?

Acts 17:29-30



## The Unknown God

- ❑ While in Athens, Paul was brought before the Council of Areopagus, and they asked him, “What is this new teaching you’re giving us?” (*Acts 17:19, NIV*) How did Paul respond?
- ❑ Read Acts 17:22-31. Paul presented the following teachings:
  - God exists; He created the universe, including humans (*17:24, 26*).
  - God is the Lord of the universe; He is in control; and He is active (*17:24, 26*).
  - God does not live in temples; He does not need us, but we need Him for life and breath and everything else (*17:24-25*)!
  - God made all humans from one man; thus we are all part of one race (*17:26*).
  - God wants us to seek Him, find Him, and know Him, though He is already near (*17:27*).
  - God is the constant source of life, and “we are his offspring” (*17:28*).<sup>1</sup>

## So What?

- ❑ After presenting the above teachings, Paul said, “Therefore ...” Read Acts 17:29-30.<sup>2</sup>
  1. Paul says a change in thinking is needed. What is that change?



## Change Your Mind & Direction

- ❑ Paul challenged his audience to turn away from wrong ideas of god, and turn toward correct ideas about God, that is, the *one, true* God.
  2. How can people know which ideas are wrong, and which ideas are correct?<sup>3</sup>
  3. Christians use “apologetics”<sup>4</sup> to help persuade nonbelievers that Christianity is true (or at least reasonable) using science, history, and philosophy. How effective is apologetics? What are its limitations? What role might apologetics play in a person’s acceptance of Christianity?

<sup>1</sup> Paul’s quotation of “we are his offspring” does not mean that all human beings are “children of God” in the spiritual sense. A person becomes a “child of God” through faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12). However, all humans are God’s offspring in the sense that we are all part of the human family that God created in his image (Gen. 1:27).

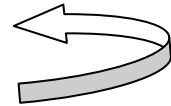
<sup>2</sup> “to repent” means “to change one’s mind and direction.” It is often used to denote turning from self and sin to God and righteousness.

<sup>3</sup> What are the sources of information? Correct ideas about God are based on “revelation.” God has revealed himself through his creation (including nature), history, and human consciousness (“general revelation”). However, “special revelation” is needed to truly know about God. God has revealed himself in special ways in history, ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible is the record of, and is, the essential special revelation of today. The fields of science, history, archeology, philosophy, and hermeneutics (relating to interpretation of texts) are all important in developing right ideas about God. Some studies provide evidence of God, while others help us understand the Bible and confirm its reliability. However, to truly understand spiritual truth, our “spiritual eyes” must be opened by God.

<sup>4</sup> “Apologetics” refers to giving a “defense” (*απολογία, apologia*) of the Christian faith.

📖 Paul told the Corinthians, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit<sup>5</sup> does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:13-14, NIV)

- ❑ Paul’s speech in Athens is applicable to “all people everywhere” (17:30). All people everywhere need to “repent.” *Everyone* needs to have a change of mind. And, since this subject is so important, a *true* change of mind must result in a change of behavior and life direction!



4. Paul would say that right ideas about God should result in *right* behavior and life direction, whereas wrong ideas about God result in *wrong* behavior and life direction. Why would he say this? Isn’t being a “good person”<sup>6</sup> good enough regardless of what we think about God? Explain.

📖 When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NIV)

📖 Paul told the Corinthians, “We urge you [on Christ’s behalf], ‘Be reconciled (restored to relationship) with God!’ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be an offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” (2 Corinthians 5:20b-21, NLT)



## Why Change?

- ❑ Why should the Athenians change? Why should *we* change? Stay tuned for Lesson Five!

### Reflection/Application

- What are *your* ideas about God? Is it difficult for you to accept the Christian teaching about God? Identify the obstacles to belief in your life. What is the basis for what you do believe? Are you willing to explore the reasons for Christian belief? Are you willing to acknowledge the spiritual component of understanding truth? Review this handout, and seek intellectual *and* spiritual understanding.
- If you call yourself a Christian, have you truly “repented?” Has your “change in mind” resulted in a noticeable change in your behavior and life direction? Is it clear that you are responding appropriately to “the first and greatest commandment?” Make a specific commitment to know God and love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

<sup>5</sup> “man without the Spirit” – lit. “natural man” (*psychikos anthrospos*) – the person who has not received the Spirit – that is, the non-Christian. This does not mean that the non-Christian never accepts spiritual truths. A non-Christian must accept some spiritual truth to become a Christian! However, true acceptance is a result of the Spirit’s work.

<sup>6</sup> While people might be “good” relative to other people, no one is “good” relative to the righteousness of God. “There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10b, 12b, 23). We cannot be “good enough” for God, so we are “separated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). However, God has provided a way for us to be restored to him. “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18, NIV). Through faith in Jesus Christ, we can enter into a relationship with God. Then we can know God and love God, which is central to right behavior and necessary for right life direction.