

Why Change?

Acts 17:31-34



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; He is active in this world. (*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! God is the constant source of life. (*17:24-25, 28*)
 - God made all humans from one man; thus we 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 commands all people everywhere to turn away from wrong ideas about god, and turn to correct ideas about God; resulting in changed behavior and life direction. (*17:29-30*)

Why Change?

- ❑ Why did Paul give his speech? So people would change! When Paul looked around Athens, he was “greatly distressed” because he strongly believed that the Athenians were wrong in their thinking and behavior (*17:16*).

1. What’s the big deal? What’s the harm? Why be “greatly distressed?” Why not be more “tolerant?” How do you think Paul would answer these questions?¹

- ❑ Paul said that God “has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed” (*17:31a*).² Judgment is required because God is holy, righteous and just.
- ❑ Who deserves God’s punishment? Everyone! Because “all have sinned” (*Romans 3:23*). But God has provided a way of forgiveness and salvation. That way is Jesus Christ.

📖 “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*).

📖 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*)



¹ First of all, it is offensive to God, who said “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). It is shameful to displace the one, true God with false gods. It is “sin” (any action or attitude that is opposed to God). Sin separates humans from God who is the Source of life and blessing (Eph. 4:18); “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 3:23). Those who reject the one, true God are under His righteous judgment (Rom. 1:18-2:16). On the other hand, those who receive the one, true God (through faith in Jesus Christ) are forgiven and accepted into God’s family; and given abundant, everlasting life. As Jesus put it, some are on the road that leads to destruction, while others are on the road that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). The Athenians were on the wrong road; thus they needed to change roads.

² “And [God the Father] has given [Jesus Christ] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27, NIV; see Daniel 7:13-14). Also see John 5:16-30, Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 19:11 and 20:11-15.

- 📖 Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (*John 3:16-17, NIV*)

The Judge's Qualifications

- ❑ After announcing Jesus Christ as Judge of the world, Paul said, “[God] has given proof of this by raising him from the dead” (*17:31b*).
 - 📖 The good news of God concerns His Son “who as to his human nature was a descendent of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” (*Romans 1:1-4, NIV*)
2. How might the resurrection of Jesus give “proof” of his identity and authority?³ How important is Jesus’ resurrection to the Christian faith?⁴



The Response

- ❑ Read Acts 17:32-34. When they heard about the resurrection, some “sneered” (mocked, made fun of).⁵ Others said they wanted to hear more. A few of them believed.
3. The different responses of the Athenians are still found today. Some sneer. Some believe. Some say they want to hear more, for various reasons.⁶ Why is the Christian message, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, difficult for many people to accept?
4. How can these difficulties be overcome?

Reflection/Application

- If you are not a Christian, carefully review Paul’s speech in Athens and identify the particular teachings that are difficult to accept. For each one, ask the question, “Why is this teaching difficult to accept?” Also ask, “Is believing this teaching automatically ruled out by my ‘worldview?’” (For example, it is hard to believe most of the Bible if your worldview is naturalistic/materialistic!) If so, ask, “What is the basis for my worldview?” Seek answers to your questions, and prayerfully⁷ seek the truth with genuine humility.
- If you are a Christian, what are you doing in *your* “Athens?” Are you “greatly distressed” by the idolatry around you? Are you sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in order to bring about change? Does your “changed life” provide evidence of the truth of the gospel?

³ Not only does Jesus’ resurrection give proof that Jesus is who he claimed to be, it is necessary for the Christian message to make sense. It was necessary to defeat sin and death, and provide everlasting life (see 1 Corinthians 15).

⁴ Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth, “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17, NIV)

⁵ Most Greeks accepted the immortality of the soul, but rejected the idea of bodily resurrection.

⁶ There are various reasons for saying, “I want to hear more.” Some are genuinely interested in knowing more, for different reasons. Some are seeking truth. Some are hopeful that the Christian message is what they are looking for. Some just want to delay their response (perhaps forever), either because of intellectual obstacles, fear of the reaction of others, potential of persecution, or an unwillingness to submit to God. Some just want to criticize and fight.

⁷ Can a nonbeliever really pray? If you are a seeker, cry out to the “unknown God.” God hears genuine seekers.