

'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #24

Acts 17:22-34^(NASB)

Acts 17:22-23 (NASB)

*So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³ "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, **I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'** Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.*

Q: Why does Paul start his defense with a reference to an altar inscribed "To an unknown god"?

- Paul was not trying to find common ground to say that worshiping Jesus was not all that different from what they were already doing!
- Paul was tapping into a well-known underlying problem common to all the philosophies and pagan worship, which was known as the "Academic View" (so named because it was taught by Plato in his "Academy").
 - According to the Academic View, there was not enough evidence to know for sure whether the gods really existed or not; and if they did, what, (if anything), they wanted from people.
 - The "Academic View" was an admission of ignorance that produced 2 kinds of responses:
 - A shoulder shrugging, 'couldn't care less' attitude
 - A kind of humility and openness to learning more
 - Paul was aiming his defense at this second group!
- Paul began and ended his address with the question of ignorance, and what God is doing about it.
 - In other words, Paul presented the gospel by starting with the problem the Athenians already knew they had, and what God was doing about that problem!



Acts 17:24-31 (NASB)

*"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' ²⁹ "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the **Divine Nature** is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰ **"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,** ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."***

****We should assume this is Luke's summary of Paul's address, and not a transcript.****

Q: Why would Paul's address be startling to the Athenians?

- Paul is starting at a point within their own complex, multi-sided system of worship, and **saying the Academics had a point...** but the time for that point had now passed!
 - Paul was telling them that, **in their ignorance, they had gotten everything backwards!**
 - Their temples, statues, (which he could have pointed to from where he was standing), and sacrifices were a sign of their ignorance.
 - God doesn't need buildings, statues, and sacrifices from them... **He is the one who gives everything to us, not the other way around!**
- The really stunning point in Paul's address comes at the end when he explains that the times of ignorance have come to an end because the Creator God has appointed one man to be the judge for the whole world. ([Vs. 31](#))
 - **This is stunning because the act of judging means God is going to set the world right... the way the Jewish tradition had always insisted He would!**
- Paul was insisting that all of them were living at a new moment in human history; something new had happened that provided evidence that God exists and has made known what He wants from us—Repentance!
 - Repentance is a double challenge: 1st, turn away from Idolatry; 2nd, turn to the living God.
 - **Not only CAN you know God, but GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW HIM!**
 - But you can't know God without turning away from Idols and turning to Him!

Q: What was the evidence to prove everything Paul was saying?

- The resurrection!

Extra Info:

Q: What is the "Divine Nature" Paul is talking about in [verse 29](#)?

- "Divine Nature" is a term that was popularly known, especially among educated Greeks.
- They believed that human beings had in themselves a part of the divine nature, which was obscured by the material and physical elements.
 - They believed, by escaping from the material world, they would come to share fully in the very nature of the gods.
 - To them, Salvation was about escaping from the bondage of the physical and material world, and living a spiritual existence in a spiritual world.
 - This thought originated with Plato, and eventually influenced Christian thought, producing the teaching that salvation is about leaving this physical world and living forever in Heaven with God... though that was never taught by Jesus or His apostles.
- "Divine Nature" is found in only one other passage of the Bible, [2Peter 1:4](#).
 - Peter modified the Greek thought of this term by making it clear that people become partakers of the "divine nature", not because they already have it, or because of their own efforts, or by escaping the physical world... but through knowing Jesus and serving Him IN this world.

Acts 17:32-33 (NASB)

*Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." ³³ So Paul went out of their midst. ³⁴ **But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite (a judge in the court of the Areopagus) and a woman named Damaris and others with them.***

Q: Why would the mention of resurrection cause some to “sneer”?

- Although Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, the idea of a bodily *resurrection* was alien to their thinking.
- They thought the body was earthly, and evil in comparison with the soul, which was the seat of the divine in man (Divine Nature).
- To them, the goal was to leave this earthly, physical existence and its corruption... not to be returned to it in a new body.

Q: How did Paul escape the Areopagus, and even win some converts?

- He was taken to the Areopagus to find out if he was a subversive.
- They found out he was definitely a subversive, but in the way someone might be subversive if they showed you how to play a piece of music the right way.
 - You might be ticked off with someone who is subversive like that, but you can't do much about it... now that the music makes sense, and the harmonies finally work!

Follow Up Assignment

Q: Where do you start when you tell people the gospel?

- Do you start with how God is addressing the problem they already know they have... or with how God is addressing a problem they aren't aware of yet?
- Axiom: *“Nobody wants an answer to a problem they don't think they have.”*

Q: What have the people you are reaching out to gotten backwards because of their ignorance of God?

Q: Do you point to the resurrection as proof the same way Paul did?

- If not, why not?