

## FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS:

### A LOOK AT THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

#### “Introducing the True God” Acts 17:16-34

Paul arrived in Athens having been driven away from Macedonia when the Jews of Thessalonica and Berea stirred up riots against him. He arrived by himself in this great cultural and religious centre, as he awaited the arrival of his friends.

Athens was a city well known for its culture and philosophical debate. It was a city that was full of religious images, and we note that Paul was distressed to see so many idols. In fact “distressed” isn’t really strong enough. Paul was angry. He was angry at this offence to God and angry that so many people were being led astray.

However, as a great centre for philosophical debate, the men of Athens were more than happy to discuss this ‘new religion’ with Paul. Some dismissed him; others were intrigued by him and took him to the Areopagus, the Council which in earlier times had governed the city. Paul was equal to the task. He began by affirming his audience, congratulating them on their desire to find and know God. He observed that the city had a statue to an “unknown God”, so told them, “I’d like to tell you about this God you do not know.” He lists some of the characteristics of God:

**God is the Creator.** “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.” Paul affirmed the Supremacy of this unknown God. He is the Creator. He contends that all you have to do is look around and the evidence for God is clearly seen.

- The world didn’t just “happen”. Someone started it. We know every design has a designer. A jet airplane doesn’t just form from a tornado going through a junkyard. The design is intricate. In the same way, as we look at creation, we have to conclude that some-one must have designed it.
- Our sense of right and wrong and hunger for the supernatural must come from somewhere. If there’s a moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver.

Paul teaches that the true God, the God of Christians, is a God who is eternal, a God who creates, who cannot be housed or controlled by men. He is bigger than our minds can ever fully grasp.

**God is the Sustainer** He not only made all things, He keeps them all going. ‘In Him we live and move and have our being’ (v.28) We need Him. If God were to back away from His creation, life would cease. If God were to withdraw His hand from the world, then the sun would stop shining, the earth would stop spinning, and we would die.

**God is the Ordainer v. 26** Life is not arbitrary but purposeful. God has not taken a “hands off” approach to His creation. He is guiding us to His purposes. We are not here by accident. God has brought us to this place. God is interested in your life. He cares about the direction your life takes.

**We should Seek This God v27 – 28** Paul's argument is simple. If there is a God who is the Creator, Sustainer, and Ordainer of men, then we should bow before Him. He is our superior, our life and our hope. Paul told the Athenians, "God is not hiding". He is not far from each one of us. It may seem as if God is far away but in truth He may be right alongside us, waiting for our call.

Paul concludes his message with some final applications. Since God is the Creator, Sustainer and Ordainer of Life, we need to stop thinking that He can be confined to the form of an idol. We must stop thinking of the Living God as if He is one of many gods in our life. We must stop trivializing His greatness. We all struggle with idolatry. There is a natural tendency to put the created order before the Creator. Anything that comes before the Lord in our life is an idol. It can be our health, our family, our job, sports, travel, or our education. ANYTHING that comes before the Lord is just as offensive to God as those golden idols that stood along the streets of Athens.

Secondly, Paul tells us that we need to repent. We need to see God for who He is, and turn from our sin to follow Him. To repent means to be sorry for our sin. It means being ready to make real changes in our lives. We can and should say, "I'm sorry for putting other things before the Lord." True repentance involves realigning our priorities. True sorrow means putting the Lord first on our calendars and fitting other things around Him rather than the other way around.

Thirdly, we should repent immediately because a day of judgment will come. One day we will be accountable before God for our actions. The question is, do you want to face that day holding on to your goodness or holding on to the free gift of grace offered to us by Jesus Christ our Lord?

Finally, Paul pointed to Jesus. He is the one who has proved His right to judge through His resurrection from the dead. The key question on that day will be, "How did you respond to Jesus?" Our eternal destiny will be determined by whether we received Christ as Saviour or whether we rejected His offer of grace. You can believe in God with great sincerity, but we must take a further step. We must embrace as Lord the One whom God has offered for our salvation.

After Paul shared his message, the Athenians responded in three different ways. One group laughed and walked away. They thought it was all a joke. They wanted nothing to do with the new life offered in Christ. They preferred idolatry to life in fellowship with the Creator. They turned away from the true God.

The second group wanted to hear more. They were intrigued, but were not ready to make a decision. These people were open. And that's a reasonable position. Perhaps this is where you are. You may be interested in the truth about Christ but are still weighing the information. Stick with the questions, until you find the answers.

Finally, there were those who believed. There were some who heard the message, confessed their sin and embraced the gift of God of eternal life through Christ. These people were made new. They went home that day as children of the living God.

It's not enough to simply believe in a god. We must believe in the true God – the God who loves us freely and unconditionally. He not at all unknown, but is there, waiting for us to make our response.