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**A0923 – June 7, 2009 – Acts 17:26-30 – Jerusalem Meets Athens -
Part 3**

Now, we're in Acts 17; Paul's encounter with the philosophers of Athens and we said we're training on the highest level because if we can witness to the greatest intellect then we can witness to anybody. So we train hard and we witness easy. Let's review some of the features of the pagan mind. There are four.

One of the first things you want to solidify in your thinking is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's Rom 3:23. In short, man is fallen and he is fleshly, his daily activities operate under the dominion of the flesh, sin reigns in them. Now, you say, but my friend lives a very moral life, others, yeah, my friend lives a very immoral life. Morality and immorality is not the issue. Satan never committed an immorality, but he did sin. And the point we have to come to grips with is that all men express sin in different ways and to different degrees but make no mistake about it, all men are fallen and live according to their flesh.

The second thing Paul knew and we should know is that the flesh is at enmity with God. Rom 8:7, "the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." You have to agree, if you're going to believe the word of God, that your friend is hostile to the things of God. Put in modern terms, he's not open-minded. He's completely closed to the things of God. His flesh is waging a war against the things of God. All of our flesh by the way does this, so even if you're a believer you can do this. Sometimes you've been taught something that is perfectly biblical, it was the word of God and you hated it, you despised it. That was your flesh. So we can't get too prideful here, but in witnessing know that the person you're trying to witness to is an enemy of God.

The third thing, and this logically follows so go ahead and turn over to Rom 1. If all unbelievers are enemies of God then do they know He exists? If I'm in a war against someone I'm pretty sure they exist. Otherwise, I wouldn't expend all the energy to marshal forces to go against them. Remember this because we're going to come back to it today. What does Rom 1:19 say? "...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." Who put the knowledge of God inside man? God did. God made it evident. Verse 20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen," how have they been seen? Clearly. We'd say with 20-20 vision they see God. From this verse is it fuzzy to people, you know, maybe there's a god out there. When people told Helen Keller about God she said, oh yeah, I already know about him. A woman who was deaf and blind, only had three of the five senses, yeah, I know God is there.ⁱ Who was there to tell her about Him? God was there, God made it evident to her. Not only do they know God exists but what else do they know about Him? They know of "His eternal power and divine nature." In other words, they don't have a vague notion of *a god*; they know the God of creation. God doesn't plant a general idea of god in a person's mind, He plants a specific idea of Himself there. That's why at the close of the verse "they are without excuse." Nobody's going to stand before God and say God, you just didn't make yourself clear enough, there wasn't enough evidence. That's baloney. In Acts 17 the inscription read TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Yeah Paul, we know GOD is there but we don't know His nature. Paul says to himself, that's baloney, something else is going on. What's the something else Paul that's going on in a fallen sinful man?

What's going on is the fourth thing we have to know and that's in verse 18, that they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. That word "suppress" means to hold down. In other words here they have truth about God but they're holding down that truth in unrighteousness. This is what sin does. Sin suppresses the truth. This is why people actually can convince themselves that God does not exist. I'm not saying a person can't stand there and tell you with a clear conscience, it's just not clear to me. They can do that. People can and do convince themselves that God is not there. But the reason they can do that is because they've closed their eyes to Him for so long that their eyelids are sealed shut. They've blinded themselves. It's as if I was to walk into a lighted room and claim, I just can't see anything. If that's the

case what's wrong? Is something wrong with the light or is something wrong with my eyes? Something's wrong with my eyes. I'm blind or I've closed my eyes and I refuse to open them. This is the suppression technique. This is what sin does. It closes the eyes to God and tries to convince you that God really isn't there. Suppression is a technique sinners use to shield themselves from Him. But closing the eyes to the light doesn't change the fact that the light is there. The light's still on, but the eyes are closed. So part of the task of apologetics is peeling back the eyelids, telling them about the light. You're bringing them into contact with the light that they've closed their eyes to. That's what Paul's doing in Acts 17. He says I see as I walk through your city that you dedicate one of your altars TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. I know that what has really happened is you've closed your eyes to the nature of that GOD. Therefore, I declare Him to you. I peel back your eyelids so you come face to face, eyeball to eyeball with this GOD. That's how he breaks through the suppression.

Now, that's Paul's approach. We've called it Presuppositional which means that Paul's ultimate commitment was to the Scripture, not human logic and experience. I say this ad nauseum because the reigning approach since the time of Thomas Aquinas has been the Classical approach which means our ultimate commitment is to human logic and experience, not the Scriptures. This has been and is the most popular approach used to defend the faith. Now, I don't think, personally, it's defending the faith at all. I think it's affirming pagans in unbelief. But, it's a modern issue. In Christianity Today, June 2009, an article by W. Jay Wood about Dallas Willard's book, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* how does Mr. Willard go about defending the faith? "How do we know (as opposed to merely believe or opine) that such a being exists? In answer, Willard offers the standard first-cause argument. The universe couldn't have popped into existence from absolutely nothing, nor could it be the cause of itself. So, there must be a non-physical cause. And whatever caused the universe to exist must have had great power, intelligence, and will. The mind, will, and power to initiate activity without oneself having been caused-to be an unmoved mover-is precisely the trait we ascribe to the God of theism. Willard follows the cosmological argument with a teleological (design) argument to explain how the universe came to enjoy its remarkable order. Willard thinks the causal argument provides a firm basis for knowing that God exists. But what constitutes knowing a claim to be true? Willard says, 'To know something is

to represent it as it is on an appropriate basis of thought and experience." What has he said? He's said the same thing I showed you with the railroad tracks. We have HVP tracks and they are going along and there's a piece of track that merges the two by a series of arguments from, what did he say? Human thought and experience. This is the classical bridge building technique. Now, with that quote in mind what two aspects of the pagan mind has Willard denied? First, man is fallen. Willard assumes that when man fell his mind did not fall and that the reasoning processes do not operate according to the fallen nature. See, the pagan mind is fallen and will use logic and experience to deny God's existence, not to prove it. He has compromised a crucial scriptural truth. Second, what else has he denied? That all men know God exists. Rom 1:18-20. Now, why are you expending so much time on these arguments for the existence of God when God already made His existence clear to all men? See, you don't want to follow this approach, it denies biblical truth, it says that the word of God is not sufficient and it says that human arguments are sufficient. And that is what we mean by presuppositions. Either you are ultimately committed to the word of God as sufficient or you are ultimately committed to the word of man as sufficient. There is no continuity between those positions.

So when Paul is called before the Areopagus in v 21, he's ultimately committed to the scriptures and he's going to respect all four of these aspects of the pagan mind. The Athenians are sinners, they're at enmity with God so I know they have a God-consciousness, and they've shown me that with their altar inscription TO AN UNKNOWN GOD, but I also know they're suppressing the nature of this GOD. So he starts very cleverly in v 22. **Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.** Now, you want to talk about ambiguity. That word translated **very religious** is about as confusing a term as Paul could use. It could be a compliment, it could be an insult and the point is Paul selected this term so they'd perk up and listen. Just what does this Jew Paul mean by calling us **very religious**? Well, you'll have to listen further to find out. Verse 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.** Now it becomes clear. Paul isn't giving them a compliment, he's insulting them. And I can hear people saying, "Now Paul you just pushed them away from Jesus and why would you do something like that? You should have been

nicer.” But there’s a thing that’s happening here. Paul on one hand is attacking, he’s attacking human wisdom, Greek rationalism, whatever you want to call it, but he’s saying it can’t know all things. And there was really nothing they could say to Paul on this point. The inscription TO AN UNKNOWN GOD proved it; it was a frank admission of ignorant worship. And Paul has said I don’t worship ignorantly. What I worship I worship in knowledge, what you worship you worship in ignorance. Now, until you have chopped human wisdom down to size you can never get a hearing. You can beat your gums about Christ, sin and salvation all day long but they’re not interested, not until you have gotten across to a person that they don’t know what they’re talking about. So by doing that Paul has engaged them. They’re all ears by v 24.

So now he’s going to start peeling back the eyelids, he’s going to tell them about the light bulb that they’ve closed their eyes to. Alright now, this might hurt, but I’m going to pry your eyelids open so you have to see who and what God is. That’s all Paul is doing in v 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29. Six verses about the nature of God. Now why do you think Paul did that? Why didn’t Paul start with Jesus? I can see most Christians today, “Paul, now, I think you messed up, you really shouldn’t have raised those controversial topics, like creation, in that context; you got people all excited over the wrong issue, you should have started with Jesus.” Nobody was a bigger fan of Jesus than Paul. Where do you see Jesus in the context of this passage? He’s not there. Why? Because there’s a logical progression to get to Jesus, and you have to follow that progression or when you get to Jesus you get the wrong Jesus. Jesus in the NT is God and man united in one person without mixture forever, and we don’t know what that means, we haven’t got a clue as to what that means if we don’t first know who God is and who man is, and the Creator-creature distinction. We’ve got to know who the Creator is, who the creature is, and after that we’ll discuss who Jesus is, because Jesus is God the Creator coming incarnate inside a creature, and that’s heavy stuff. And that’s why if you look at your Bible, look how many pages are devoted to pre-Jesus; two-thirds of this book is pre-Jesus. Now, doesn’t that hint that when the Holy Spirit is going to present Jesus in history there’s a little preparation involved? And so Paul isn’t writing a new curriculum on how to preach the gospel here, a new four spiritual laws booklet. He’s just following the curriculum of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit started with Creation Paul said, then it’s good enough for me.

So verse 24, we said last week, **The God who made the world and all things in it.** The first thing Paul does there is he separates. He says, the God I'm talking about made the world, He's not the world. The Creator-creature distinction. You have got to get that across to people. As long as people are confused on the Creator-creature distinction you can forget everything else. If you have to spend 5 months getting it across to someone then spend five months. The second thing Paul did is by saying God made the world and all things in it is what? He's enveloped them. Remember in the marketplace they enveloped Paul. And Paul said I'm never going to let that happen again, so one of the first things I do is I envelop them in God's universe. You Athenians are in the world and therefore God made you. So he's countering the strategy they used against him by going back to creation. That event is the defining event for who and what God is.

Now, v 25 **since He is Lord of heaven and earth does not dwell in temples made with hands.** Can't you just picture Paul pointing up at the great Athenian Parthenon, sitting up on the acropolis, the great temple of the goddess Athena? Who made that temple? Men made that temple. Why did they make it? Isn't it because they first had an idea of a god? That building, for all its architectural genius is the projection of a human idea about god. That's all it is, it's the projection of human imagination. It tells us how the Athenians thought about gods and goddesses, they were things fashioned by men and that men fashioned little dwelling places for. Now think about what Paul has just said. If God made the world and all things in it then He made a dwelling place for you, you don't make a dwelling place for Him.

He does not dwell in temples made with hands as though He needed anything, if God made all things what could He possibly need. He doesn't need a thing. He doesn't need food, He doesn't need air to breathe, He doesn't need you, and He doesn't need me. He's self-sustaining, He's self-sufficient, and He's independent. In fact Paul says, it's not He who needs things, it's us, **He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.** You want to talk about a packed verse, try unpacking this one. We're totally dependent on Him, always and everywhere, we can't escape Him. Just think of the magnitude of this, always and everywhere, every minute of every day all people are coming into contact with God. They take a breath, who gave them that? God did. They say a word, who gave them that capacity? God did. They

construct an argument to deny His existence, who enabled them to do that? God did. In other words, God is back of all things. And therefore everything that we ever do, say or think that does not assign to Him the glory is sinful rebellion. Every moment of an unbeliever's life is sinful rebellion.

What this means, thought of another way, is that everything in all creation is a Christian fact. Every piece of evidence is Christian evidence. There is no such thing as a piece of evidence contrary to Christianity. Everything that is is Christian. Last week the news blurb came out, "The Missing Link Found; Darwin's Theory Finally Proved." No, it wasn't. There is no evidence for evolutionary theory. It was another discovery of a variation of one of God's created kinds. Had nothing whatsoever to do with evolutionary theory, had everything to do with what God created. But the suppression is at works see, the endless re-interpretation of every fact of Christianity to deny Christianity. God says it's sin and that they know it.

Now, verse 26-30 Paul continues developing the nature of God. **and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.** In other words in v 24 God made the world and in v 26 God also made **every nation from one man.** The Greeks prided themselves in being *autochthonous*. They considered themselves having sprung up from Greek soil and therefore they were a unique and superior people. As you probably know the Greeks considered everyone else a barbarian. Either you were Greek or barbarian in their thinking. Paul swipes that idea right here; **He made from one every nation.** And therefore Greeks, you are not a superior race, all races of men are equal. Paul deals a death blow to racism right here. We all share a common ancestry and therefore no race is superior to any other. Now you probably think that the **one man** all came from here is Adam. Granted it's true that all men did come ultimately from Adam. But here he's talking about the origin of **nations**. When did the nations begin? Nations didn't begin till after the Flood. So now Paul has moved from the event of Creation to the event of the Flood. See how he's going through the historical framework? He just goes from event to event. So the **one man** here isn't Adam but Noah. Noah gave rise to three sons; Shem, Ham and Japheth, the three basic branches of the human race in terms of skin tone and contribution to the human race. Shem provides the spiritual, Ham provides the physical and Japheth provides the intellectual. Each branch has it's unique contribution to the human race and out of Noah's three branches

came the Table of Nations in Gen 10: the seventy nations God originally divided the human race into (Deut 32:28) according to the number of Jews who went down to Egypt. Israel is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Everything in the world is revelatory of God. So God **made the nations**. He also, v 26, **determined their appointed times** or “seasons.” Now, you could say that’s about the rise and fall of nations, when Egypt would rise, when she would fall, when Assyria would rise, when she would fall and so forth. Or the word **times** there can be translated “seasons,” that’s how I take it, that’s what Paul brought up in his address in Acts 14 which is similar at a number of points. So here we’re talking about weather and climate. So when did God in history establish the seasons? Did he do that at Creation? No, at Creation on day 4 He created the sun, moon and stars in the sky to distinguish the seasons because the weather couldn’t be used to distinguish them. You had to look at the sun, moon and stars. So before the Flood climatologically you had a very rigid and stable system. That lasted from the Creation to the Flood, a period of about 1600 years. That was a great period for mankind. Josephus says their food was far superior, they were all vegetarian of course because that’s the original diet before the Flood and so with the longevity of man, the vegetarian diet you needed to grow a lot of food and they had the perfect growing season; year round. You could go out and sow and behind you would be the reapers, it was a fantastic environment, and they were bringing in a lot of food. At the Flood things changed radically. Now all of a sudden you have a different climatological system. So you’re shifting from one steady state to another steady state and it takes some time for that transition to take place, but the Lord promised in Gen 8:22, (get a load of this weather forecast, talk about a meteorologist putting Himself out there, God puts Himself out there on this one), “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.” Now there’s going to be fluctuation, there are still limits placed on the environment but the controls are not as tight as before the Flood and so now we have cold and heat, summer and winter and so forth, but there’s still stability. Apparently that serves a spiritual function, we’ll come back to that. So this determining of the seasons is a Flood related issue.

Then we read a third thing God determined...**the boundaries of their habitation**, that is, the boundaries of nations. You know, “borders,” that kind of thing. How does God do that? Well, think first of the boundaries of nations. If you like to study maps what do you often find at the borders of

countries? Certain geographical features. What we would call, extreme things, difficult to cross. Maybe it's a river, maybe it's a mountain range, and maybe it's an ocean or a lake. Those tend to be natural dividing lines. Who made those and when? God made them at the Flood. The Flood in Noah's time was a massive global catastrophe, that wasn't a local event over in the Mesopotamian river valley. That was a global inundation of planet earth. You think that had major geological repercussions? Of course it did. If you've watched footage of some of the local floods in China or hurricanes down on our Gulf you've seen what water can do. Water is a very powerful force and all you have to do is look at some of the tremendous geological features on our earth to see some catastrophe caused that. What the Bible is indicating is that the Flood of Noah caused planet earth to change so much that it can be technically categorized as a different planet. That's why Peter in his second epistle chapter 3 says of the world before the Flood of Noah that it was the world that then was and we live in a different world. In other words, what he's saying is that if we had such a thing as a time machine we could go back to the world before Noah and when we stepped out we'd say, uh oh, did we just go to another planet? That's the whole point. It was a totally different world. And what that means in the final analysis, if you read Scripture closely, is that before the Flood you had a single land mass, some scientists call it Pangea, there are other intermediate states, Lauroa and so forth. The creationist view of this is a little different. Modern science, because it works off of a philosophy of gradualism, explains it by the theory of sea-floor spreading, creationists see something else. A catastrophic process that divided the land mass into the present configuration, our current theory is Catastrophic Plate Tectonics. So what this means when it says He determined the boundaries of the nations is that when you look at a world map, that projection is what God determined.

And according to verse 27 God did it that way to promote spirituality. God made the nations, the present climate system and the world's geography after the Flood of Noah for the express purpose of verse 27, **that they would seek God**. You say, "What? What do nations, climate and geography have to do with spirituality?" Everything! That's what he says, all the racial divisions that exist on the face of the earth, the very position of the continents, the very climate patterns, this is a profound view of history that goes on here in one verse. Seven continents, is that by chance or by design? Paul insists it's by design. Paul insists it's the way it is to promote spirituality.

Here's where this business of neutralism doesn't work. What verse 26 and 27 are saying is that you cannot study or teach geography without getting yourself into either a Biblical position or non-Biblical position. The science of geography itself is either Biblical or anti-Biblical. Here's the purpose for the geography of humanity. You say how? I don't see how geography has anything to do with God's word. Think of the spiritual movements in history. Where did Paul take the gospel in the Book of Acts? Did he take it to the heart of Africa? No, he took it to Europe? Where did Christianity flourish, in Europe or Australia? Obviously Europe. Where did Christianity have its new birth in the Reformation? Europe. When things began to peter out in Europe where did the puritan Christians move? To North America. What stands between Europe and North America? 3,000 miles of ocean. Did the Atlantic Ocean serve as a continental buffer to conserve spirituality? You bet it did. For awhile. And so this is what Paul is saying. The very shape of the continents has been designed to promote spirituality.

The seasons have been designed to promote spirituality. Seasons? What has meteorology and weather got to do with the Bible? You mean to tell me that we can't be neutral with respect to climate and weather? Exactly! Because here the purpose of weather and climate is given and it's either a Biblical purpose or an anti-Biblical purpose. And the issue is that God has seasons in order to improve spirituality. You ask, "How?" Let's try one example. How many times are people drawn to prayer because of the weather? Maybe you're having a drought. What do people start saying? Lord, we need rain. Just think of all the prayers that must go up because of some weather phenomena? Maybe it's a hurricane, a drought, a flood. Weather compels men to approach their Creator from the standpoint of the creature and say, yes God, you control that, I can't do anything about it, but you can.

So v 27 is saying the whole thing was set up in the post-Flood world so men **would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him.** Now that word **might grope** in the Greek is what we call an optatives. The optative is a fourth class condition, it's extremely rare in the NT, only used 68 times, and at the time it was basically dying out and being replaced by the subjunctive. You would never use this unless you were speaking to an audience whose first language was Greek or you were very good in Greek because the nuance is so slight it's hard to catch as an English speaker, it's

practically impossible to translate in our language. Let me explain. If it was a third class then what it would be saying is maybe you'll grope for Him, maybe you won't. The fourth class is more like this, if you're groping for him and I hope you are but you're not. It's sort of like a wish, it's sort of like God is saying, I did all this because I wished for you to grope for Me but you're not going to. It's just a wish. Now why aren't they going to? Because they're fallen sinners. The game of fallen man is not to seek God but to suppress Him. They already know he's there and these things were given by God to enhance their seeking after God, but even that doesn't do it. They're like men in a dark room groping around trying to find the door. It's a picture of blind men. And it's not a complimentary view of man; it's a depraved view of man. Put another way, Paul says this over in 1 Cor 1:21, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God." Look at that, who were the men known for all their great wisdom, *sophia*, the Greeks, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, who are these guys, their intellectual descendants. Did they come to know God through their human wisdom, starting with man as autonomous? Did Greeks make their way to God by rationalism? No, they did not. They reached the gods and goddesses but they did not reach the God of Creation. And it's simply because their fallen sinful nature said, no, I will not go there.

Now, can man blame God? God, it's all your fault I couldn't find you. The last part of verse 27 puts the responsibility upon man, not upon God. **He is not far from each one of us.** He's right there, what did He give them in v 25? **life, breath and all things.** Is God nearby? He's right there. So is it God's fault? No! God says it's your fault.

And to prove his point he quotes in v 28 some of their own poets. What was one thing we said about all unbelievers? Can they be 100% consistent with their non-Christian philosophy? No, they always get a contradiction somewhere, they always show us somewhere that, yes, I really do know God is there. So now Paul says, aha, even your poets slipped and showed us they know God. And so in v 28 he quotes Epimenides the Cretan '**for in Him we live and move and exist,**' and quote number two, Aratus from Cilicia, '**For we also are His children.**' In the contexts Paul's quoting these out of they're not talking inside an HVP system but Paul envelops them and says, when I place these phrases in a DVP context they come out as evidence from your own guys that you really do know God is there. And he's not saying that

God is the universe and **we live in Him** or that we're God's biological **children**. The point is that God made us in His image, we're His children in that sense and secondly He sustains us just as in v 25, He gives us life, breath and all things, in Him we live and move and exist. We depend upon Him.

Therefore v 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.** And notice the **ought** word thrown in there. Now we have a moral judgment. When someone says you **ought** to do this or you **ought** to do that, what inevitably are they appealing to? A standard. Somewhere there has to be a standard they are appealing to. Where does that standard come from? That's a very valid question to ask. If someone makes a 'should' or 'ought' statement just politely ask them, "By what standard? Where are you getting your standard from?" And see what they say, you may actually have a very interesting discussion. Inevitably they're going to say from me, from society, from nature, and you can very easily show how that ultimately fails. Paul has already told them where the standard comes from. If we are the children of God, that is He made us in His image, then He is the standard and therefore, wouldn't it be wrong to think of God as something that man fashioned? Wouldn't it be morally atrocious to re-make Him after our image? That's what Paul's getting at.

Here's how it worked in the ancient world. Men, for example in Egypt, pictured their gods as hybrids of men and animals. So you have Horus, Horus was the falcon; Anubis was a jackal and so forth. They took the attribute of the animals and projected them onto the man who was a god. This is why when the Israelites came out of Egypt what did they do at Mt Sinai that ticked God off? They made a golden calf and Aaron said, "This is your God who took you out of Egypt." They were doing what the Egyptians had done in Egypt: they had slurped up Egyptian religion while they were there and when they came out and they wanted to worship YHWH they made an image of Him in the form of the Apis bull and inevitably projected the qualities of the Apis bull which are created qualities, onto the Creator. God didn't like that too much, it was idolatrous. And the Greeks did that too. They had 30,000 statues in Athens, the unique thing the Greeks did, by the way, was they pictured the gods and goddesses as men and women and not animals. That's an upgrade from Egypt. Egypt was freshman level idolaters; the

Greeks were seniors level idolaters. And so Paul says, you know, on the basis of your own poets its wrong, morally wrong to make gods into statues. He made you, you can't make Him. All this is coming out of your finite brain. See, this is the real problem Paul is aiming at, man's imagination, all these gods and goddesses before a sculptor ever took a tool to the clay to form it into an image, had what? An image in his head, a thought, and a projection of what a god must be like. That's where the problem is, the problem isn't in the skill of the sculptor, painter or writer, the problem is in man's thoughts. Man inevitably brings God down to finite man.

Therefore, v 30, here comes the grand conclusion to this part of the argument, **Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent**, and we'll stop at this point because he gets into some other doctrine later on. Now has he mentioned anything about Jesus? Do you see Jesus anywhere in vv 22-30? No you don't? But he's still calling for repentance. Why's he doing that at this point? Don't you first have to give the gospel before you can say repent? Repent about what? Repent about who God is. You say god is an image formed by the art and thought of man. But it is God that formed you. Therefore, the very first thing that has to happen before we can ever get to Jesus and salvation is we have to have a ground shift in our view of who God is? This is all preparatory to the gospel. The gospel, look as hard as you like, but you won't find it in these verses. You'll find the resurrection coming up, but there is not a complete gospel presentation in this address. Paul never even got to that before they cut him off. So what's this telling us? It's telling us that before you can get to Jesus, you have to get a person straight on who and what God is. Later, in chapter 20, Paul is going to say that everywhere I went I preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those are two different things Paul preached in that order. First he would go in and preach repentance toward God. By which he means you've got to have a change of mind about who God is. You've got God all messed up in your thinking, you've created God in man's image. So repent about God. Then, if they listened to that and repented about the nature of God, then and only then did he preach faith in the Lord Jesus. There is a logical progression to get to Jesus. You can't start with Jesus. And that is why more and more mission's agencies are seeing that when you go into some tribe you don't go in and start telling them Jesus stories, you go in and you start telling them God stories. Because Jesus

is God and man in one person without confusion, mixture or separation forever, and that's heavy stuff. So you start off with, alright, first let's get down to basics, who's God. God is the Creator, the maker of the universe. Alright, who's man? Man is made in the image of God, he's the creature. And then you may tell them about how God is the sustainer, He sustains you, He sustains me, He gives us life, breath and all things, you don't give to Him. He gives to you and He's been giving and giving and giving to you and your people for centuries, He even establishes the seasons so that you have rains and fruits in their due seasons. He determined national boundaries on the continents for spiritual reasons, that men would seek Him and **now He's declaring to all men everywhere that they should repent.** You should have a change of mind about who and what God is. Once you get who and what God is straight then we can talk about Jesus. Jesus is wonderful, Jesus is the savior, but you will never get to the Jesus of the Bible if you don't get straight the God of the Bible. I close with a very concerning quote by Harold O. J. Brown in 1969. Mind you this is forty years ago in American evangelicalism when Brown put forth his concern. "When the great nineteenth century evangelist Dwight L. Moody went among the Union troops in the War Between the States, men would often beg him, 'Tell me what I must do to be saved.' When the twentieth century evangelist Billy Graham says the same thing, a large percentage of his hearers is simply incapable of grasping his message – and this percentage must include many who are sufficiently moved by him to 'come forward'...The problem is not that people will not listen to an evangelist like Graham. Large numbers of them gladly listen to him. It is not even that they will not respond. Substantial numbers do. It is even when they have listened, and even when they have responded, they still may not understand. In many cases they cannot understand, because...they still remain prisoners of the total culture." And if that's the case then when many listen and respond they are doing nothing more than adding Jesus alongside their other gods. Missionary after missionary reports that in many professing Christians overseas Jesus is nothing more than another magic charm used to ward off evil spirits. Did they ever truly accept the Christ of Scripture? No. Jesus was presented prematurely and they never understood who He was or what He did. And that is what Paul was trying to avoid, that is what we should be trying to avoid as we witness. A message that is not understood can't be believed.

ⁱ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 17:27.

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