



Now What?

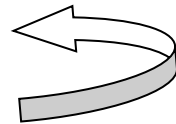
Acts 17:29-34

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*) Read Acts 17:22-31.

Why Did Paul Give His Speech?

1. Paul wanted people to respond to his speech. What responses did Paul want? (*17:29-30*)

Paul challenged his hearers to turn away from wrong ideas of god, and turn toward correct ideas about God – that is, the *one, true* God. Paul said that “all people everywhere” need to “repent” – that is, *everyone* needs to have a change of mind and direction (*17:30*).



2. How can we know which ideas about God are wrong, and which ideas are correct?¹
3. Paul would say that a right attitude toward God leads to *right* life direction, while a wrong attitude toward God leads to *wrong* life direction. But someone may ask, “Isn’t being a ‘good person’² good enough regardless of what we think about God?” What would *you* say? (Consider the verses below.)

- 📖 *Jesus said*, “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.” (*Matthew 22:37-39, NIV*)
- 📖 *Paul wrote*, “We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” (*2 Corinthians 5:20b-21, NLT*)



When Paul looked around Athens, he was “greatly distressed” because he strongly believed that the Athenians were wrong in their thinking, actions and direction (*17:16*). Paul gave his speech so that people would change.

¹ What are the sources of information? Correct ideas about God are based on God’s ‘revelation.’ God has revealed himself through what he has made (‘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. See 1 Corinthians 2:13-14.

² While people might be ‘good’ relative to other people, no one is ‘good’ relative to God. ‘There is no one righteous, not even one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (*Romans 3:10b, 23*). We cannot be ‘good enough’ for God, so we are ‘separated from the life of God’ (*Ephesians 4:18*). However, God has provided the 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 Christ, we enter into a relationship with God. Then we can know God and love God, which is necessary for right life direction.

Why Change?

Paul wanted people to change their ideas and attitudes toward God so that God would be honored as He deserves. Failure to honor God as the one, true God is offensive to Him.³

4. What specific reason did Paul give for “repenting” (changing one’s mind and direction)? (17:31)⁴

Who deserves God’s judgment? Everyone! Because “all have sinned” (*Romans 3:23*). But God has provided the way of forgiveness and salvation. That way is Jesus Christ.

- 📖 “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 to everyone by raising him from the dead” (17:31b; *Romans 1:1-4*).⁵



The Response

Read Acts 17:32-34. When they heard about the resurrection, “some of them sneered” (mocked, made fun of).⁶ Others said they wanted to hear more. A few of them believed.

5. The different responses of the Athenians are still found today. Some sneer. Some believe. Some say they want to hear more, for various reasons.⁷ What do *you* think about Paul’s message (or the Christian message in general)?
6. If you are a believer, how does Paul’s example in Athens instruct and encourage you?

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?” Seek answers to your questions. Humbly and prayerfully⁸ seek the truth.
- 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 It is shameful to displace the one, true God with false gods. Dishonoring God is ‘sin.’ Sin separates humans from God who is the Source of life and blessing (*Ephesians 4:18*). ‘the wages of sin is death’ (*Romans 3:23*).

⁴ Those who reject the one, true God are under His righteous judgment (*Romans 1:18-2:16*). Judgment is required because God is holy, righteous and just. ‘And [God the Father] has given [Jesus Christ] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man’ (*John 5:27, NIV*). Also see *John 5:16-30*, *Matthew 25:31-46*; *Revelation 19:11* and *20:11-15*.

⁵ Not only does Jesus’ resurrection give proof that Jesus is who he claimed to be, it is essential to the Christian faith. It was necessary to defeat sin and death, and provide everlasting life (see *1 Corinthians 15:14, 17*).

⁶ Most Greeks accepted the immortality of the soul, but rejected the idea of bodily resurrection.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Can a nonbeliever pray to God? If you are a seeker, cry out to the ‘unknown God.’ God hears genuine seekers.