

Christianity on the Grow

Acts 17:15-34

“The Mars Hill Masterclass”

Presented by
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BACKDROP/SETTING

- **Paul was filled with compassionate angst.**

J. D. Grear Idolatry Test (Adapted)¹

- The thing I am most worried about losing is _____.
- The thing I am most worried about never attaining is _____.
- If I could change _____ right now, I would.
- What has made me the most bitter in life?
- What are you willing to lie for?
- Where do you turn for comfort?
- Whose approval do you seek?

HOW DO YOU SPEAK FAITH TO THE AGNOSTIC?

- **We must display a respectful understanding of their point of view.**
- **We must speak the truth in their language.**
- **We must focus on what all people crave...**
- **We must focus on Christ**

DISUCSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you see the potential for idolatry in your own life?
2. What would deep concern for those who do not think like you look like in your life?
3. If you were to paraphrase a Scripture for our times, what would it be?

¹Greear, J.D., (2019, September 22). *Therefore*. Sermon presented at The Summit Church in North Carolina, Durham. (<https://summitchurch.com/message/therefore>)

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON ACTS 17

PAUL'S SPEECH IN ACTS 17

Here is Paul's entire speech in Acts 17:

Acts 17:22-31: *"Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

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 human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."

Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Now that we've got Paul's entire speech here, let's take a closer look at what he's saying in verses 24-31.

BREAKING DOWN PAUL'S SPEECH

In verse 24, Paul starts at the beginning of creation, making references to Genesis, Isaiah, Deuteronomy, and 1 Kings:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah 42:5: *"This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it..."*

Isaiah 66:1-2: *"This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' declares the Lord."*

Deuteronomy 10:14: *"To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it."*

1 Kings 8:27: *"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"*

In verse 25, Paul makes a reference to the Psalms:

Psalms 50:9-12: *"I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it."*

In verse 26, Paul refers to Deuteronomy and Job:

Deuteronomy 32:7-9: *"Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you. When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance."*

Job 12:23: *"He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them."*

In verse 27, Paul refers to Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah:

Deuteronomy 4:7: *"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"*

Isaiah 55:6: *"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near."*

Jeremiah 23:23-24: *"Am I only a God nearby,' declares the Lord, 'and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?'" declares the Lord. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?'" declares the Lord."*

In verse 28, Paul refers to Deuteronomy, Job, and Daniel:

Deuteronomy 30:19-20: *"This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."*

Job 12:10: *"In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."*

Daniel 5:22-24: *"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription."*

In verse 29, Paul refers to Isaiah and Jeremiah:

Isaiah 40:18-20: *"With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him? As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple."*

Jeremiah 10 - *Hear what the Lord says to you, people of Israel. This is what the Lord says:*

Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the heavens, though the nations are terrified by them.

For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel.

They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."

In verse 31, Paul makes multiple references to the Psalms and to Daniel:

Psalm 9:7-8: "The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity."

*Psalm 96:13: "Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness."*

Psalm 98:9: "let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity."

Daniel 7:13,14 I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him.

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."*

Paul quotes some of the Greek philosophers of the day (Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom, Seneca) but answers their arguments with beautifully paraphrased scripture!

Adapted from multiple authors - Brian Gadwa, Russell Moore, and un-named blogger.