

**Is Our God the Real God?**  
**Acts 17:22-31**  
**Sunday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021**  
**By Ryan Perry**

**Scripture: Acts 17:16-31**

*[16] Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.*

*[22] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for*

*"In him we live and move and have our being";*

*as even some of your own poets have said,*

*"For we are indeed his offspring."*

*[29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

**Pray**

## **Introduction:**

I want to begin this morning by reading you an excerpt from a Time Magazine article from 2018 entitled: **“How Your Brain Tricks You Into Believing Fake News.”**

*Sitting in front of a computer not long ago, a tenured history professor faced a challenge that billions of us do every day: deciding whether to believe something on the Internet.*

*On his screen was an article published by a group called the American College of Pediatricians that discussed how to handle bullying in schools. Among the advice it offered: schools shouldn't highlight particular groups targeted by bullying because doing so might call attention to “temporarily confused adolescents.”*

*Scanning the site, the professor took note of the “.org” web address and a list of academic-looking citations. The site's sober design, devoid of flashy, autoplaying videos, lent it credibility, he thought. After five minutes, he had found little reason to doubt the article. “I'm clearly looking at an official site,” he said.*

### **But he wasn't. It was a fake.**

The article goes onto say:

*The bookish professor had been asked to assess the article as part of an experiment run by Stanford University psychologist Sam Wineburg. His team, known as the Stanford History Education Group, has given scores of subjects such tasks in hopes of answering two of the most vexing questions of the Internet age: Why are even the smartest among us so bad at making judgments about what to trust on the web? And how can we get better?*

Along with this information the article cited that:

*A 2016 Pew poll found that nearly a quarter of Americans said they had shared a made-up news story. In his experiments, MIT cognitive scientist David Rand has found that, on average, people are inclined to believe false news at least 20% of the time. “We are all driving cars, but none of us have licenses,” Wineburg says of consuming information online.*

The truth is that we are all susceptible to saying something is real and true when in reality it's actually fake. This was no different in Paul's day. In Acts 17, while he is waiting for Timothy and Silas to meet him in Athens, Paul looks around the city and is provoked by all the false idols that the Athenians worship as true gods. Zues, Ares, Chronos, and Helios are just a few of the many false gods and idols that they would call real.

And Paul is so agitated by the sight of these false idols that he begins to reason with the Athenians and the prominent philosophers about who Christ is and the truth of the resurrection.

To no one's surprise these people couldn't see how false and fake their idols were. In fact, many of them called Paul a "babbler" which basically means a half-baked teacher, while others called him a preacher of foreign divinities (plural) because they thought he was saying Jesus and the Resurrection were two different gods.

**But the point is that they were blind and missed the truth of what Paul was saying, and instead they were prone to believe in what was fake.**

But all was not lost. They were at least intrigued enough that they asked him to share more about this "new teaching" in the Areopagus. Now the Areopagus in that day was a group of men who had the final say, in Athens, on all matters relating to philosophy, religion, and morality.

So Paul, comes before them in verses 22-31 and delivers one of his most succinct, eloquent, and well-known apologetic arguments for God. And it is in this discourse that he does two main things. **One, he identifies what their false gods are, and two, he gives them a grand vision for the one true and living God who is greater than these idols.**

And this morning I want to do the same thing. I want to take this passage and press it into our hearts realizing that each of us are like the Athenians and the philosophers of their day. We are prone to believe and follow false gods (idols) around us, and we constantly need reminders of who our God is and how he is calling each one of us to respond to him on a daily basis.

With that said, I want to remind us of the following 4 truths

- 1. Our false objects of worship (V. 22-23)**
- 2. The one true and living God is the creator and king of all things (V. 24)**
- 3. The one true and living God does not need us but created us to need him (V. 25-27)**
- 4. The one true and living God calls us to repentance (V. 28-31)**

So let's begin by looking at our false Objects of worship.

### **1. Our false objects of worship (V. 22-23)**

**Acts 17:22-23:**

*[22] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.*

As Paul begins his discourse with the Athenians and the gathered philosophers he doesn't waste anytime getting right to the heart of the issue. He says "hey, you have a lot of objects that you worship." **Notice that he calls them objects and not gods. He doesn't want them to think that he thought they actually were gods. No, instead he calls them exactly what they are,**

**“objects.”** In fact, there are so many of these objects that he even points out that they have an altar with the inscription “to the unknown god.”

And because he has seen all these objects of worship it compels Paul to call these people religious. **Meaning that they were very devoted to the upkeep and worship of these idols.**

Now, when we think of our society, religious is probably not the word we would use. In fact, more people identify as atheist (no belief in God) today than in any other period in human history. But there are many ways in which are society can still be considered religious.

For example: Many people have an almost religious type devotion to this thing that happens on Sunday’s in the fall and winter called football (Go Vikes). Or people have an almost religious vigilance about making sure that they have enough money for whatever they want to buy or for retirement.

There are very religious undertones associated with our consumption of media and how much time and energy we give to it. I mean we consume show and entertainment as if they are a type of god that needs our devotion and can satisfy our deepest longings. **To highlight this, think about how many people couldn’t help but be sucked in by the train wreck that was the Tiger King: Documentary. It had people’s hearts, energy, and devotion.**

And lastly, in our country, we often have at the center of our religious devotion “ourselves.” This includes our devotion to things like comfort, security, fulfilment, and to “self-autonomy” which means we don’t want to need others.

These are just a few of the gods in our society many of whom we knowingly or unknowingly serve on a daily basis.

But the apostle Paul’s words must wake us up to the truth that all of these objects of worship are just that. **Objects.** They offer no real life, they offer no real fulfilment, and they can’t give us what our souls long for and need. **But they can and should do one thing...**

Just as Paul used the altar to the “unknown God” to proclaim the real God in verse 23, when these false idols fail to give us the life and fulfilment we want, they should cause us to long for more. Which means that we should look beyond these fading earthly idols to the One true and living God who is the creator, sustainer, and purpose of all things.

And so let’s do that this morning. Let’s look beyond the false objects of worship and begin to look to what Paul says about the one true God.

## 2. The One True and Living God is the creator and king of all things (V. 24)

**Acts 17:24:**

*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,*

Now, I realize that you probably don't think that I need to belabor this point for you, but I do want to make sure that we all understand what Paul is saying.

First, he's saying that the real and living God made the world and everything in it.

Everything that we see, taste, touch, smell, and create. Everything that we own. Every person that we hold dear. All the jobs that each of us hold. All the money that is sitting in our pockets and/or bank accounts. **Anything you can name was created by God and has come from God.**

And this a truth that scripture is repeating and reminding us of time and time again.

As it says in **Isaiah 42:5:**

*[5] Thus says God, the LORD,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people on it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:*

Or as it says in **Revelation 4:11:**

*[11] "Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created."*

In fact, direct mention of God creating everything is found in 26 of the 66 books of the Bible, among 66 chapter, which totals around 208 verses. **All that to say that God wants us to understand that he is the one and the only one who created everything.**

The stuff we see is not just the overflow of our genius or somehow put here randomly so that we can do with it whatever we want. No, there is a perfect and sovereign God who created it, who created us, and therefore rules over everything that exists.

As Paul says of God in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of verse V. 24, *"...being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,"*

And in this one sentence we see Paul doing something amazing. He is tearing down all that the Athenians believe about their objects of worship. Whereas they have gods (idols) that rule over one thing like the water or wind, Paul advocates for the one True God who created everything and rules everything.

The Athenians built temples and statues to their various gods whereas Paul says the One True God doesn't live in a temple made by human hands. This is Paul's very elegant and well worded way of saying, **"Your created idols or gods are fake, and the only true God is my God (Yahweh) who created everything, rules everything, isn't created, and can't be contained in a temple."**

Now, I'm not questioning whether or not we believe this statement intellectually. Most of us come here because we believe that God created and rules everything including us. And we believe that he went on this amazing rescue mission by sending his son Jesus Christ to earth to die for our sins so that we could be his children forever.

**But I am questioning whether we believe it in our hearts.**

I look over the past year and a half and I am struck both by what has consumed my thoughts and the thoughts of other Christians. **The fear over the Coronavirus, vaccine fears, whether or not the government is trying to control us, economic downturn, who the next president will be, and whether or not our taxes are going to go up.**

This of course is not to say that these things aren't on some level important, but it is clear that our obsession with these topics reveals in our hearts that our god (idol) is our comfort, and we have failed to believe and live as if our God is the creator and king of all things.

That he not only rules over everything, but that he is also using everything both big and small to accomplish his great and good purposes on this planet, in our nation, and in our lives.

But you might say, "Pastor Ryan, what could possibly be God's purposes for things like Antifa, the Coronavirus, riots, identity issues, the political and social divide, and the seeming unrest that little by little feels like it is tearing apart the fabric of the free republic we call the United States?"

And the answer to that is found in our third point for this morning.

### **3. The One True and Living God does not need us but created us to need him (V. 25-27)**

Listen carefully to an excerpt from a blog post from January 4 of this year from the blog "God in All Things."

*God needed a family to say yes in order to send the Son as a baby into the world because a baby needs caregivers. But God's vulnerability was not limited to the helplessness of the*

*newborn Jesus. Vulnerability is integral to God's self and God's creation. In his book The Four Loves, C.S. Lewis wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable," and if we truly believe that God is love (1 John 4:8), then this vulnerability is intrinsic to the divine. Love is always unconditional, always vulnerable, or it is not love. Anything less would be transactional.*

*God is love. God is vulnerable. Yet our understanding of God's omnipotence obscures our understanding of God's abandoned love.*

*What are the implications of this? God needed the Holy Family. And as God continues to create in this world, God needs us.*

I read this to you because this is the way that many people (including ourselves at times) think about God and why he created everything. We can so easily fall into the trap of believing that somehow God needed us. Maybe he was lonely or maybe he isn't able to accomplish his purposes without us. Whatever the reason he really needs us or more directly me because (fill in the blank)...

But Paul's words about God are so directly against this in verse 25 when he says:

*[25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

To put it plainly, God doesn't need us. He isn't served by us as if we can give him something that he doesn't already have. We in and of ourselves are not unique and special, and the only reason we have value and worth is because God has chosen to give it to us.

Instead, his purpose for creating everything, every person, and every nation is the exact opposite of him needing us. His purpose for creating all mankind was that we would see and feel our need of him.

As Paul says in verses 26-27:

*[26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.*

Do you see how big the implications of these verses are?

1. Paul is reinforcing the idea that God created every person and nation and that he did it from one man (Adam).
2. He not only says he created every person, but that he alone has determined the periods and boundaries of their dwelling places. Now we talk often of God's sovereignty and his determining will in this church, but I want you to fully understand what this means.

**This means that God has purposed everything, all creation, all peoples, all nations, all countries, and everything that would happen in them. It is all predetermined by him.**

And I know for many American's, even some of you, that can be super hard to take because we have been fed the lie of freedom which says that we are free from everything including God. And we spend lots of energy on thinking about how we can maintain this sense of individual freedom.

But these verses fly right in the face of our sense of freedom and remind us that our lives have been determined and purposed by God. **And the purpose for which we are created is so that we would seek after God and find him.**

And we know that this is God's great purpose for our lives because he has been working from the beginning of time to make this perfectly and fully possible through the shed blood of his Son Jesus Christ. So that we could actually seek after God and by his Spirit find him, know him, and spend forever with him.

This is God's great purpose for all things including us. That we should feel our need of him, that we should seek after him, and through the magnificent work of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross we can find him and know him. **And the result of that is that this God, our God is glorified, honored, cherished, and praised above all other things.**

As God says through Isaiah in Isaiah 42:6-7 says:

*[6] I will say to the north, Give up,  
and to the south, Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the end of the earth,  
[7] everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made."*

So if we understand what our false idols are, if we see that our God is the creator and king of all things, and if we grasp that God's purpose for everything is that we would seek after, find, know, and honor him as God. Then the final question is how is he calling us to respond to him?

#### **4. The one true and living God calls us to repentance (V. 29-31)**

*[29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, **but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,** [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*



According to Paul, our God, the triune God, who is Lord of heaven and earth is not something that comes from the imagination of man. He is the one true and living God who sent his son Jesus Christ into the world so that those whom he has called by his name will find him.

And he has made it clear that a real judgement is coming when he will judge each person on how they have lived and whom they have lived for.

And so, his command to us, much like these men in the Areopagus, is to repent. To see the manmade objects that we are following and putting in the place of God. To turn away from and reject them as things that can give us real life and satisfy the longings of our souls.

And finally, to turn toward, seek after, and live every moment of our lives to make much of the one true and living God who is our creator, who is our king, and who deserves all of our glory, honor, and all of our worship. **For he is the only real God.**

**Let's Pray**