

Introduction: True Christianity is always foreign to the world, but it is exactly what the world needs. *** I'm going to get blunt. Too many people think a fetus is no more than a toxic growth a woman should be free to remove and throw away. When Kurt Vonnegut wrote *Slaughterhouse Five* in 1969 he had a 'throw-away' line that extra-terrestrials could see seven genders in humanity, all necessary for human reproduction. There are now many people who seriously consider human gender to have at least seven categories, if not more. *** The Bible says that in the beginning God created humanity male and female (Genesis 1:27), no more, no less. And an inspired Psalm written by David (a man after God's heart, 1 Samuel 13:14) has a poetic stanza describing how God has 'skillfully wrought' a baby in the womb of its mother (Psalm 139:13-16, NAS). *** The challenge all Christians have is to explain these truths in a way so that those who are ignorant of God will listen, and if it is God's will they will repent, change their minds about God and themselves. *** This morning's account of Paul in Athens is an excellent example of how people can do this. He was greatly grieved by the idolatry there. But, as he took his time, he uncovered a Gospel key in their altar to an 'unknown god'. After initial opposition, he was invited to speak to the leading philosophers in an open forum. He acknowledged their interest in religion; and, building on it, he declared to them the 'unknown god': the resurrected Jesus. *** Let's now go deeper in our texts.

I. Paul reasons with philosophers in Athens about Jesus and the resurrection; and, when they take him to the Areopagus, he begins with their 'unknown god'. (Acts 17:16-23)

- A. Paul was being upset by idolatry in Athens, so he reasoned in the market with philosophers who called him a 'seed picker' because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. (Verses 16-18)
- In Athens, waiting for them Paul, was being stirred the spirit of him in him, seeing full of idols being the city. (Verse 16)
Idols grieved Paul: Luke states that, as Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea, the idols he saw in the city were making him upset.
 - Therefore, he was reasoning indeed, in the synagogue to the Jews and to the devout people, and in the marketplace each day to those being present. (Verse 17)
Reasoned: His response was to reason with people day after day: in synagogues to those open to the things of God, and in the marketplace to whoever was there.
 - But certain of the philosophers encountering him were saying, 'Whatever may he be desiring this "seed-picker" to say?'; but others, 'Of foreign gods, proclaimer he is seeming to be', because Jesus and the resurrection he was preaching. (Verse 18)
'Seed-picker': Literally refers to birds picking up every seed they can find without regard to the type of seed. Figuratively, it is a person who gathers every scrap of trivia without organizing it.
Foreign 'God': Even in 52 AD The Gospel of Jesus and His resurrection was not known in Athens.
- B. Then Paul is brought to the Areopagus and asked the meaning of the surprising things he is bringing; he begins by respectfully declaring about their 'unknown god'. (Verses 19-23)
- And having taken him, to the Areopagus him they brought, saying, 'What we are being able to know which, thee are being speaking, this new teaching?' (Verse 19)
New teaching: Being generous to the 'seed picker', they ask him to elaborate on what he was saying to them about Jesus and His resurrection. Areopagus is Greek for 'Mars' (the war god's) Rocky Hill'.
 - 'Because certain surprising things thou are bringing to our ears, we are desiring to know what these things mean?' (Verse 20)
Desire to know meaning: The story of Jesus is surprising to anyone the first time he or she hears it. But, beyond the facts of what Jesus did, what does it mean in a person's life? What should we think? How should we feel? What should we do?
 - All Athenians and visiting foreigners in nothing else were spending time, but either to tell something or to hear the newest thing. (Verse 21)
Asides: As a good narrator, Luke gives important information about what people did in Athens. Not just local philosophers, but even foreign visitors, spent most of their time conversing about all the newest ideas and things.
 - But Paul, having stood in the midst of Areopagus, said, 'Men! Athenians! Concerning all things, as very religious I am seeing you all, because passing by and closely observing the objects of worship of y'all, I found also an altar in which it had been written, "to unknown god" '. (Verses 22-23a)
Religious: He tactfully calls them religious, not idolatrous. And he points out they are willing to worship a 'god' they are not knowing. This 'unknown god' becomes Paul's entry point into proclaiming The Gospel of Jesus.
 - 'Therefore, whom being ignorant you all are worshipping him, I am declaring to you all!' (Verse 23b)
Declare unknown: With this key of the unknown God, Paul prepares to declare Jesus to the men of Athens. May we be inspired by Paul's example to humbly search for a Gospel entry-point within the worldview of people who are our neighbors.

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II. Paul says their poets have said we are children of God, but He will no longer overlook ignorance and commands all to repent before He judges, some mock and some believe; and, Jesus has revealed God's grace. (Acts 17:24-34; John 1:16-18)

- A. Beginning with God's sovereignty in creation, including filling the earth with humans, Paul says their poets have said we are children of God. (Acts 17:24-29)
- 'The God having made the world and all the things in it, this one of heaven and earth is being Lord; not in temples made with hands He is dwelling'. (Verse 24)
Lord of creation: Paul is saying the Creator and Lord of all creation, both heaven and earth, cannot 'fit' in a man-made temple!

2. ‘Neither under the hands of mankind He is being served, needing of anything; He giving to all: life and breath and everything’. (*Verse 25*)
He gives life and breath: The Lord and Creator has no need of what humans can give Him; rather, positively, He gives people everything they need for life!
3. ‘And He made from one, all the nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth, having determined the had been appointed times and the bounds of their habitation’. (*Verse 26*)
Filled earth: This affirms the Genesis account of creation starting with one human, then a woman; and affirms they followed their Creator’s mandate to be fruitful and fill the earth: all under His lordship.
4. ‘If perhaps indeed to seek The Lord they may feel after Him and they may find Him: indeed also not far from every one of us being’. (*Verse 27*)
Find God: Paul says The Lord may be found by those seeking Him because He is not far from anyone, even though He is the infinite God not in need of anything from His creatures.
5. ‘For in Him we are living, and we are being moved, and we are being, as also some of your own poets have said, “For of the [god] also His offspring we are being” ’. (*Verse 28*)
Own poets: First, Paul asserts that life is found IN The True God and His direction. Then, Paul claims that even some poets in Athens have written that people are the children of God. May we all seek to find common ground with our neighbors on one or more truths about God.

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6. Then, offspring being of God, not we are being bound to think gold or silver or stone, engraved by the craft and imagination of man, to deity to be the same’. (*Verse 29*)
Poor substitutes: After building common ground, Paul now takes on the folly of idolatry. No one can bring precious metals or stones to life as a ‘god’. Idols are a poor substitute for the living God!
- B. Paul says God will no longer overlook ignorance and is commanding all to repent, and God is going to judge by the man He raised from the dead: some mocked, but some believed. (*Acts 17:30-34*)
1. ‘Therefore indeed, the times of ignorance having overlooked, God; now, He is commanding to all men, everywhere, to repent’. (*Verse 30*)
Repent: The purpose of Jesus coming is that all people everywhere now need to repent. In other words, people need to be made uncomfortable about their ‘natural’ way of life that is ignorant of God and His ways in order to always live aware of Him and seeking to live according to His ways.
 2. ‘Because He has appointed a day in which He is going to judge the inhabited world in righteousness in the man whom He has designated, faith having given to all’. (*Verse 31*)
Judge in righteousness: On the last day, when Jesus returns to earth, all people will be judged according to the standard of His righteousness. No one is naturally good enough to be found innocent.
Gospel: The good news is that God has made available to everyone the faith that makes people righteous. The question is: who has received this faith and surrendered to The Faithful One – Jesus?
 3. But having heard resurrection of the dead, some indeed were mocking; but others said, “We will hear of thee concerning this also again” ’. (*Verse 32*)
Mixed reaction: Some were not persuaded by Paul’s common ground presentation of The Gospel of Jesus; but, others were still open to hear more.

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4. So Paul departed from their midst; but, certain men having been united to him believed, among whom also: Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (*Verses 33-34*)
Some believe: Some came to faith in The Resurrected Savior. Whenever we present Jesus following Paul’s example we should expect some people will make a faith commitment to God in Jesus.
- C. We have received grace in the fullness of The Word; instruction was given through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus who has uniquely revealed God. (*John 1:16-18*)
1. Because of His fullness, we all have received grace on behalf of grace. (*Verse 16*)
Grace: This sentence is very emphatic. From the fullness of The Word of God who took on human flesh, all who are in Him are given extreme grace, every gift in Jesus Christ!
 2. Because the Torah (instruction) through Moses has been given; grace and truth through Jesus Christ became. (*Verse 17*)
Moses: God gave His instruction for living in His blessing through Moses; but, people are powerless to fully do it.
Messiah: Grace and truth became reality through The Savior-King! Let us receive grace to have strength to do the Torah.
 3. No man had seen God at any time; the unique God, who being in the bosom of The Father: this one revealed. (*Verse 18*)
Unique revealer: Through the miracle of the incarnation, when Spirit God took on human flesh born of a virgin, God was revealed in a new and unique way – including His grace and truth,

Jesus reveals Divine grace and truth

Conclusion: Although Paul was grieved by the idolatry of the people in Athens, he used their altar to an ‘unknown god’ to make Jesus and His resurrection known to them. John declares that grace and truth came through Jesus who also uniquely reveals God.

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