

## Part Two

### *The Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth*

#### TEXT:

##### **Read the Apostles' Creed as a group**

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell  
The third day he rose again from the dead  
He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead  
I believe in the Holy Ghost  
I believe a holy catholic church; the communion of saints  
The forgiveness of sins  
The resurrection of the body  
And the life everlasting. Amen.

##### **Acts 17:22-36 – Paul Addresses the Areopagus**

<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> 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.’

<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> 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.”

<sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out from their midst. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

## **STUDY:**

### **1. READ**

- a. What was Paul's overall observation about the culture of Athens? (See also Acts 17:16).
- b. What are key assertions that Paul makes about the Creation? Which are specific to you as an individual? According to Paul, how should people respond to God the Creator?
- c. What does Acts 17 say about God and history?

### **2. MEANING**

- a. Based on Paul's statements at the Areopagus, in what ways are we "offspring of God"? How is He our Father?
- b. In what ways is God's fatherhood like human fatherhood? In what ways is it different?
- c. Many people today deny the existence of God. They believe we are merely a random collection of atoms. Others believe that at best we are subject to, or guided by impersonal forces or fate. How do Paul's statements challenge these worldviews?

### **3. APPLY**

- a. Is the culture of first-century Athens relevant to our situation today? If so, how?
- b. When you think about the scope and complexity of the known universe (from distant galaxies to the intricate design of DNA, to the smallest of subatomic particles), what most astounds or inspires you about the Creation?
- c. How does your understanding of God as Almighty Creator and our Father impact how you view yourself? How does it influence how you think and act?

## **NOTES:**

v.22 – The Areopagus, or Mars Hill, was the highest point in the city of Athens, and was the ultimate venue for philosophical teaching and debate in the Hellenistic culture of the time. It was here that Paul engaged with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:16).

v. 23 – The people of Athens worshiped a great many gods, with idols and altars erected throughout the city (v.16). It was not as though they only worshiped “an unknown god”. Rather, that altar was apparently erected to cover their bases in case they somehow missed a deity. Today we don’t see formal altars “to an unknown god”. Nevertheless, some people today will intellectually acknowledge that there is or may be some type of God, but believe he (or she, or it) is beyond comprehension and fully unknowable.

vv.24, 25 – Here Paul asserts that God is the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He existed before the creation and is distinct from it. He is the source of our existence and is not dependent on our efforts to control or limit Him (much as we are prone to trying). This fully contradicts the Greek belief in a pantheon of gods, many of whom were capricious, ill-tempered, jealous, warring with one another, or otherwise subject to human foibles.

vv. 26-27 – This is a clear and sobering statement of God’s sovereignty over human affairs and history. It directly challenges the Epicurean teaching that the gods (although they exist) are unconcerned with human affairs, and therefore mankind need take no account of them. Rather, the Bible is clear that history has a meaning and trajectory; it is the story of God’s “rescue mission” for mankind – to bring people to Himself, through his Son.

v.28 – Here Paul quotes two Greek poets, probably Epimenides of Crete (6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.) and Aratus (3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.). While he acknowledges their recognition of divinity, he elsewhere challenges their polytheism and views of how the gods interact with men.

v. 29 – Paul calls out the widespread Athenian practice of worshiping and attributing power to idols of stone, gold, and silver that were fashioned by local artisans. Today our idols are typically less tangible and less overtly worshiped, but nevertheless, exert a powerful influence on our lives.

vv. 30-31 – Paul states that God, although formerly patient, now commands (not invites) people to repent and turn towards Him. He also explains God’s rationale (“because ...”) and validation (“...he has given assurance...”). These words summarize a cohesive storyline of history with a past, present, and future endpoint. This contradicts the Greek notions that the universe is eternal and that history is cyclical, without beginning or end.

## COMMENTS

The Epicureans and Stoics represented the most influential schools of thought in the Greek culture of the time (although there were others). Epicureans thought that knowledge came only through the senses, that the gods were uninvolved in human affairs, and that the greatest good was to enjoy pleasure in moderation with friends, while assiduously avoiding pain. Stoics conceived of the gods and man as part of a universal oneness or intelligence, a kind of polytheistic pantheism. Their greatest good was the pursuit of virtue despite one's predetermined fate, which included unavoidable hardship and adversity.

These high-level characterizations, though, are inadequate. The Epicurean and Stoic schools were highly sophisticated, cohesive systems of thought developed over centuries by learned Greek philosophers. They did, though, differ significantly about the nature of reality and how one should therefore live. In short, they were two distinct worldviews, both of which have influenced Western thinking, even to the present day. (It should also be noted that these philosophies in the first century were somewhat different from today's common notions of "Epicurean" and "Stoic".)

Paul, in his address to the great thinkers of his age, challenged both of these worldviews, as well as popular idol worship, by laying out sharply contrasting Biblical teachings on reality, with the following points:

- There is one God, not many.
- He is Almighty – not limited, capricious, and fallible.
- He is Almighty in the creation of all things.
- He is Almighty (sovereign) over mankind; He is not dependent on us, but we are dependent on Him.
- He is Almighty (sovereign) over nations, rulers, and history.
- He is Almighty (sovereign) in launching a rescue mission that He assures will be successful.
  - He is personal and desires that we seek Him, even ordering the times and nations of history to that end.
  - We need to seek Him and find him because we are separated from Him.
  - He is nevertheless close and available to us.
  - He commands our repentance in coming to Him.
  - He will Judge the world in righteousness, through Jesus, who rose from the dead.

Some have contended that Paul, in his address at the Areopagus, did not fully explain the gospel and God's plan of redemption through Christ. It is likely that Paul's address was much more extensive than recorded in these verses since debates at that venue typically lasted hours. Further, he had previously been "preaching Jesus and the resurrection" in the marketplace with the Gentile crowds, including the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (v. 18).

In any event, many of Paul's assertions on Mars Hill correspond with the phrase in the Apostle's Creed: "God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth". These credal concepts were

familiar to the Jewish inhabitants of the land but were jarring to the ears of the Athenian Gentiles. So, it is no surprise that some of them mocked Paul (v. 32). But Paul set the stage for further discussion with others; “we will hear you again about this.” He understood that before people can truly appreciate the “Good News” of Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection, they need to understand the “bad news” of sin, separation from God, and a future judgment.

**SUPPLEMENTAL VERSE AND QUESTION** (Optional for Study Groups):

**1 Corinthians 8:6** <sup>6</sup>yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Corinthians 8:6 states that we exist for the Father and through the Son. How does that differ from the perspective of our culture? How should that impact our lives and thinking?

**REFERENCES:**

*Athens Revisited (An Exegetical Study of Acts 17)* by D. A. Carson, available online at <https://lifecoach4god.life/tag/acts-1716-34-exposed-by-don-carson/>

*Paul at Mars Hill – Parts 1&2* by R. C. Sproul, available online at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/paul-mars-hill-part-1>  
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/paul-mars-hill-part-2>

*Rooted: The Apostles’ Creed* - Second Edition, by Ray Cannata and Josh Reitano, 2019, Chapter 1: I Believe in God the Father Almighty, White Blackbird Books, United States.