

FBS “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth—Declaring & Defending the Faith” 1-15-17  
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**Intro.** Being rightly equipped in life can be a matter of life or death or the avoidance of pain—military personnel in battle must have bullet-proof vests, as do police officers. Hockey goalies must have lots of protection, including face masks. Baseball catchers must be equipped & boys have to wear protective cups (I learned the hard way in high school). Today we continue “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth.” We will look at Acts 17 on “Declaring & Defending the Faith,” because whether you do it or not can be a matter of life & death for your recipients.

Theme: Apologetics & evangelism

Background: Athens was the foremost Greek city-state since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. In its prime, it was the political, educational and philosophical center of the world. It had been home to Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus & more. By Paul’s day, it had dwindled to some 10,000 residents, living in the glory of yesteryear.

### **Overview of the Narrative:**

- Luke records what Paul saw (17:16, 22-23), how he felt about what he saw (17:16), what he did (17:17-20) & what he said about it all (17:22-34).
- What did Paul see? A city smothered with idols—Greek mythology taught them to worship some 200 different gods—it was easier to find a god there than a man (Xenophon)—even today, the Acropolis (show pic) stands out for its architectural ingenuity & beauty. There stands a temple to Athena (show pic), from which Athens gets its name. Even more impressive is the Greek Parthenon, the temple of Zeus (show pic), where Indiana Joel went on to discover the Areopagus, Mars Hill (show pic), the place Paul declared the gospel to the Athenian philosophers.
- How did Paul feel about what he saw? He was greatly distressed (word used for seizures; irritated, provoked, roused to anger). As God is a Jealous God, unwilling to share His glory with another, so Paul was jealous for the holiness of God & angered at all the idols to false gods
- So what did Paul do about this? He debated in the synagogues with the Jews & God-fearing Gentiles & spoke in the agora (the marketplace) with others, preaching Jesus & the resurrection. He encountered Epicureans, who believed the world was due to chance & there would be no survival of death & no judgment (modern day atheists & evolutionists). Thus, humans should pursue pleasure, especially detached from pain, passion & fear. Paul also met Stoics, who believed in a pantheistic god (all is god) & that the world was determined by fate & humans must pursue their duty to live in harmony with nature & reason, developing their own self-sufficiency
- Some of Paul’s critics were interested in hearing more but some called him a “babbling” or “seed-picker,” like a bird which flies around picking up a little bit here & a little bit there—someone who picks up a few ideas here & a few elsewhere, plagiarizing from others & not having any original thoughts—especially since Paul kept quoting biblical authors & secular poets (who offered a few true statements)
- What Paul said about all of this was to proclaim to them the God they didn’t know, which they built an altar to in case they were to be judged or miss out on some blessings—Paul isn’t saying they really worshipped God, but got their attention for admitting they were a religious bunch who were open to learn more. Paul’s message had to do with declaring & defending the faith & I’ve broken down his message into 4 key issues

➤ **When you defend & declare the gospel, share four key issues:**

**1. Share there is One True God (17:24-29)**

**a. He is Creator (17:24-25)**

- Different than the Epicurean belief about the world forming by chance or the Stoic belief about nature as god, for the One True God created the world
- Scripture highlights the roles of God the Father, God the Son & God the Spirit involved in creation (Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1-5)

**b. He is Holy (17:24-25)**

- God doesn't live in manmade temples & He isn't represented in idols & He is separated from mankind because He is holy & pure & full of light

**c. Sustainer (17:25)**

- He gives life & breath & all things—we depend on God; He does not depend on us

**d. He is Sovereign (17:26)**

- God is the Ruler of all nations, determining how long they will last & how far they will extend
- Even the Greek poet Epimenides of Cnossos in Crete noted “in God we live & move & have our being” (6<sup>th</sup> century BC)
- As Sovereign Creator, God is father of all humankind, because their lives depend on Him, but most of the time God as Father is spoken of in Scripture, it is not in creation terms but in redemption terms—He is the Father of those who are in Christ by grace & adoption
- Paul quotes their own poets to expose their own inconsistency—you shouldn't worship idols because God isn't found in the idols

Illus: When you think about defining God, one of the first descriptions is not just God being sovereign, but Almighty—He reigns over all—and if He is almighty, then there cannot be any other gods (for they wouldn't be almighty); though false gods fight for our attention

**e. He is Spirit (17:29)**

- God cannot be captured in an idol, for He is Spirit (cf. John 4:24)

**2. Share we are sinners, separated from God (17:29-30)**

- Though sin may be done in “ignorance,” that still isn't a valid excuse before the Creator—Paul isn't saying God condoned it, but that He hadn't judged it fully yet in light of the new covenant—those who hear the good news & reject it are worse off than those who never heard, but both are condemned because of their sin

Illus: I've said before & the Bible teaches, especially Romans 10, that the 7 year-old boy who survives a shipwreck & swims to a secluded island & lives alone until old age & never hears the gospel will go to hell when he dies, because God has made Himself known generally through creation (Romans 1), but his judgment won't be as severe as the person who heard the gospel & rejected it

**3. Share Jesus as the only answer (17:18, 31-32)**

**a. He lived a sinless life (17:31)**

- The reason God can judge the world by Jesus in righteousness was because Jesus lived a righteous life—a sinless life—the only one to ever do so (cf. 1 Peter 2:22)

**b. He died in our place (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3)**

- While the cross isn't specifically mentioned in this text, we need to remember that Luke wrote a summary of Paul's message & not word-for-word (or it would have been much lengthier). Paul always preached Christ's death or else preaching the resurrection

wouldn't have made any sense. Furthermore, once he left Athens, he traveled west to Corinth, where he preached Christ's death, as he reminded the Corinthian believers about the basics of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

**c. God raised Him from the dead (17:18, 31-32)**

- The resurrection is central to Paul's message, for it's referenced 3x in this passage. It must be central to our message, too, because Jesus didn't just die, but He rose from the dead (lots of religious leaders die & some people even sacrifice themselves for others, like police officers, but none has sacrificed himself only to rise from the grave except Jesus)—His resurrection proves He is Lord & Judge, which is the next item

**d. He is Lord & Judge (17:31; cf. Romans 1:4)**

- His judgment will be universal (He will judge the world), it will be just (righteous) & it will be definite (a day has been set & the Judge has been appointed)

Illus: Johnny Cash's song "When the Man Comes Around"—"There's a man goin' 'round takin' names. An' he decides who to free and who to blame. Everybody won't be treated all the same. There'll be a golden ladder reaching down. When the man comes around"—the judgment is coming & only those who walk the golden ladder of Christ by grace escape it (cf. Genesis 28; John 1:51)

**4. Share the need for repentance from sin & trust in Jesus (17:30-31, 34)**

- Paul reminds us that God is commanding people everywhere to repent & believe in Jesus—some believed & joined the faith

Illus: If all you do is share the good news about God & sin & Jesus as the only hope, but you don't tell people their responsibility to repent & believe, you leave them hanging—they may try good works to gain God's favor, but that won't cut it, because they are never good enough—they must turn from their sins & trust in Jesus

**Conc.** The first church I served as a preaching pastor at had an adult SS teacher who said "Paul failed in Athens." Was Paul a failure in Athens? We aren't told of a great church there. We aren't told of scores of people, but we are told "some men joined him & believed." As long as Paul shared the gospel & was obedient to Jesus, he wouldn't fail, because God brings the increase. What about you? Maybe you haven't led scores of people to faith in Christ, but if you are faithful to tell others, God will save some. But if you don't tell anyone, then you aren't faithful but a failure. Don't be a failure, but be faithful in sharing the good news of Jesus. Sharing the good news begins by receiving the good news. If you haven't turned from your sins & trusted in Jesus, won't you do so today?