

Conversations on
Acts 17:22–31

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Watch the video “OBF Mime—‘You Are Everything’ by Tye Tribbett” on YouTube (bit.ly/EverythingMimeDance). The song is based on Acts 17:28. How do the movements add to the lyrics?

What is important is the speech itself. What the speech attacks, using the very arguments of Greek philosophy, is popular Greek religious practice—the worship of idols—and not the religious theorizing of the philosophers. Then why direct his speech at these philosophers? It may be because they represent the highest of Greek culture. Nevertheless, something is still odd about this passage. One does not get the impression that Luke is thinking of such a specialized audience, cultured elites who occupy their time with intellectual matters. Paul speaks, in a sense, to the whole of Athens, and through Athens to the entirety of Greek culture and religiosity. (*Michael Joseph Brown*)

- ✪ Why is the worship of idols considered a serious sin in the Scriptures?
- ✪ Why was it effective for Paul to quote the poet who had said, “In him, we live and move and have our being?”

WHERE is God in these words?

As we confess in the Apostles’ Creed, “we believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son . . . who ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.” In our own restlessness, we have retrieved “the unknown god” and entrusted those who consider themselves religious to name this deity as they will. Reminiscent of the ancient philosophers, Ravi Zacharias writes, Jesus “told us that the only way we could understand who we are is to cast our gaze . . . on the relationship toward which we move in the sum total of our being,” the relationship with Christ and Christ alone. (*Sean A. White*)

- ✪ What is the theological contrast Paul makes between the Athenian gods and the God he proclaims?
- ✪ What is the difference between being “religious” and worshiping the true God whom Paul describes?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

The challenge is to say to those around us, “We see your spiritual hunger. Might we offer sustenance from our rich store of spiritual resource?” The challenge is to find the imagery and language that allow us to enter another’s world in order to speak our truth honestly, respectfully, and effectively. What does it mean to be so fully rooted and grounded in God, so centered in our own experience of the Christian story, that we cannot keep from sharing it? In the words of the old hymn, when we feel our faith in our very bones, “how can we keep from singing?” (*Randle R. [Rick] Mixon*)

- ✪ What does it mean that attempts to satisfy our “hunger” through being “religious” do not bring us to the true God whom Paul proclaims?
- ✪ What are points of common ground between the religious experience of others and our experience of God in Jesus Christ?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

Much of the art and creative productivity in this world, at its deepest level, is expressive of the *Spiritus Creator*, God’s ever-creating Spirit present within all creative process. Rather than shunning this creative potential, Paul recognizes it all around him and celebrates it as something that could potentially open us to the God who wants to be known in Jesus Christ. We as preachers can encourage congregations toward this same kind of “doxological living,” in which we are thankful for all of the gifts around us, no matter how ambiguous, and are always looking for and finding in all human endeavors the unknown God and the desire to know more about that God. (*John S. McClure*)

- ✪ What “unknown gods” does the true God call us to stop seeking today?
- ✪ What aspects of human endeavors can point us toward the true God?
- ✪ Where do you see God’s creative Spirit at work around you as God’s self-giving comes to “all mortals”?

God, in whom we live and move and have our being, help us to root out the gods that distract us from you. Amen.