

“The God Who Made the World and Everything in It”

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Acts 17:22–34 (ESV)

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.”¹

Christians believe that their religion is the true story of God, the world, and everything in it. That’s why we are Christians. We shouldn’t be Christians only because what we believe comforts us, or helps us cope—though I would add that the Christian message does help us find comfort in this world, and it does help us deal with the difficulties of life. We should be Christians because Christianity is true. That’s why we want other people to be Christians. We want people to know and believe the truth, because the truth will set them free (John 8:32). We want people to know Jesus and have a relationship with him, because he is the truth (John 14:6).

The questions we want to consider today are these: How do we communicate the truth of Christianity to people who don’t really understand what we’re saying? How do we show them

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

that Christianity is true? How do we show them that what they believe about life isn't quite right? How do we show them that the Christian worldview is the only one that accounts for the most important things in life? If you're not a Christian, you may wonder how I can make such bold claims about the truth of Christianity.

We'll get our answers from the apostle Paul, who shared the Christian message with a number of Greeks in Athens. Today, I'll spend about half of my message explaining Acts 17:22-34. Then I'll talk about how we can demonstrate the truth of the Christian worldview and how it makes better sense of our experience as human beings than the other worldviews that people have.

Last week, I explained that Paul, who was commissioned by Jesus to bring the message of Christianity to people in the Roman Empire, ended up in the city of Athens. (Last week's text was Acts 17:16-21.) Athens was a center of philosophy. It was also a city full of idols. In the Greco-Roman world, there were many gods, and it was generally acceptable to add another one to the pantheon. So when Paul saw all these idols in Athens, he decided to preach the gospel. He was bothered that everyone wasn't worshipping the one true God. He knew that if they were going to find salvation from sin and death, they needed to have a relationship with the God of the Bible. So he preached in the synagogue and in the marketplace. The marketplace was not just a place to buy and sell things; it was also a place where ideas were exchanged. When Paul preached about "Jesus and the resurrection," two groups of philosophers, Epicureans and Stoics, thought that he was actually preaching about two different gods. They obviously didn't understand Paul and they thought he was a confused, amateur philosopher.

Because they thought Paul was teaching about gods that were foreign to Athens, they brought him to the Areopagus, the city council. ("Areopagus" means "Mars Hill.") They did this because this council decided which gods could be worshiped in Athens. If Paul was introducing new gods, they wanted to know what these new gods were. They probably also wanted to know if these new gods needed temples, and who would pay for the land, the building, the priests, and the sacrifices.²

² "The introduction of a deity into a city would prompt the magistrates to ascertain the novelty of a cult, the desirability of allowing the cult and the requirements of the cult, such as the need for a temple or an altar, sacrifices, festivals and processions." Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 101.

So Paul is invited to explain his message to the Areopagus. Before we start to look at his speech, I want us to notice that Paul doesn't quote the Old Testament. His message is certainly built on the Old Testament, and there are many allusions to passages in the Hebrew Bible. But Paul knows that quoting the Bible wouldn't carry any weight with these Greeks. But he does quote a couple of Greek poets to support his argument. What Paul is doing is looking for points of contact between his worldview and the Greek worldview(s). He does that to show that since Christianity is true, it even accounts for the claims that some of the best Greek minds made.

We'll also see that Paul will agree with a few of the beliefs of the Epicureans and the Stoics. But more often than not, Paul is correcting their beliefs. He points out their ignorance and their false views of God. I'll explain these things as we go.

So, without further ado, let's read the first couple of verses, verses 22 and 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.

Paul begins respectfully, addressing them as "men of Athens." Apparently this was a conventional way to address this group. Paul shows that he knows the appropriate way to speak to his audience. He tells them that they are "very religious." This could be a compliment. But it could also be translated "superstitious." Given what Paul is going to say, he is not complimenting them. He is going to point out their idolatry. He has seen their objects of worship and even noted that they have an altar dedicated to "an unknown god." Ancient writers claimed that there were altars to unknown gods in Athens and in other cities in the Roman Empire. It seems the Athenians needed to cover their bases by building altars to gods they didn't even know. It was sort of like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There's evidence that when an old altar was rebuilt or repaired, and the writing on that altar couldn't be read, people would say it was "to an unknown god" because they couldn't figure out who the god was.³ That's how superstitious the people of that day were.

Paul uses this as a point of contact, a way of telling them about the real God. In other words, he uses this as an entry point to his explanation of who the real God is. We need to look

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 335-336.

for moments when we can turn conversations toward a discussion of the true God. And, like Paul, we need to be willing to say, “I want to tell you about something you don’t know.”

Just this past week, I met a woman who was probably in her 70s and who said she went to a Catholic church. She was asking about our church and I told her that we explained the Bible here. She said she had heard the Bible read in church, but no one had ever explained it to her. She admitted that she didn’t really know the Bible at all. And this is a woman who has been going to church! The reality is that we are surrounded by people who are very religious or superstitious in their own ways, but who don’t know God.

Then Paul proceeds to tell these men about the true God, the one that is unknown to them. This is what he says in verses 24-29:

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.

In his speech, Paul makes a number of points about God. First, Paul stresses that God created everything. This would have been offensive to the Epicureans, who thought that matter was eternal and uncreated. It also would have offended the Stoics, who were pantheists. Paul tells them that there is a great distinction between Creator and creation. This is very important to the Christian worldview, and it sets it apart from many other views. The Epicureans and today’s atheists believe that everything is matter. The Stoics and today’s pantheists, who could be New Age spiritualists or people who believe in certain eastern religions, believe that everything is god. But Christians say there is a distinction between God and everything and everyone else.

Second, Paul tells them that God does not live in temples, unlike the false gods who supposedly lived in the temples in Athens. The Epicureans would have agreed. They didn't believe that the Greek gods lived on earth. They thought that these gods couldn't be bothered with the affairs of earth.

Third, God doesn't need human service. After all, everything is God's, since he created everything. He has given everything life. The Greek word for life, ζωη, is related to Zeus, the Greek god. Paul tells them that the God of the Bible, Yahweh, and not Zeus, is the author of life.

Fourth, God made every human being from one man. Paul means Adam, of course. This would have offended the Greeks, because they thought of themselves as ethnically superior. They also believed that they came from their own land. By telling them that all humanity started with one man, Paul is telling them their ideas of superiority were wrong. All human beings come from the same source.

Fifth, Paul indicates that God is in control of history. God has decided the periods of time when people would live and the lands in which they would live. That's what "periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" means. God has determined when and where people would live. (Deuteronomy 32:8 says that God divided mankind and fixed the borders of nations.) People of different nations used to have their own gods, but now the one true God was calling people from different nations to himself.

Sixth, Paul tells them that God created everyone so that they should seek him "and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him." At first, this sounds flattering to humanity. It sounds like everyone can find God. But the language of "feeling their way" describes a blind person groping around in the dark. And, ironically, God "is actually not far from each one of us." God is close to us, but we are groping around in the dark, and we can't find him. Paul is saying, "God's omnipresent. He's right in front of your nose, but you don't even know him." The truth is that God needs to find us if we're going to have a relationship with him.

Seventh, all of this indicates that God is both transcendent—he is the almighty Creator—but he's also near to us. He is a personal God. All of these things would offend both the Epicureans and the Stoics. To bring these ideas home, Paul quotes two Greek poets. The first poet is probably Epimenides. This poem, in its original context, is actually about Zeus.⁴ Paul is

⁴ Interestingly, Paul uses part of this verse in Titus 1:12, where it says that "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

not saying that this poet was right about Zeus. Instead, Paul is saying that the poet got something right, but he attributed it to a false god. The poet had an inkling of the truth. But it is the true God that gives us life. The line could be translated, “By him we live and move and have our being.” That is true. God gives us life, and we can only find eternal life in him.

The second quote comes from a poem by Aratus, who was, like Paul, from Cilicia. The original poem is also about Zeus, and it’s fairly pantheistic. It says, “All the ways are full of Zeus. . . . The sea is full of him; so are the harbors. In every way we have all to do with Zeus, for we are truly his offspring.”⁵ Once again, Paul isn’t saying this poet is right. He’s saying that this poet grasped some bit of truth. The poet knew a couple of facts—that God is omnipresent and that we all come from God—but he didn’t interpret them rightly because he interpreted them using his own distorted worldview. The truth is that all human beings are God’s offspring in the sense that we come from Adam, who Luke calls the “son of God” in Luke 3:38. That doesn’t mean every human being is a child of God in the sense of being adopted by God and having a relationship with God. Still, this poet sensed this fact because, even though he didn’t believe in the one true God, he was still living in God’s world.

Eighth, Paul says that we shouldn’t think of God as something made out of gold or silver or stone, “an image formed by the art and imagination of man.” His point is this: If we are made by God, and we are personal beings, how can we think that God is an impersonal being made by us! God is not made in our image; rather, we are made in his image! Obviously, this attack on idolatry would have offended the Greeks.

Paul doesn’t just tell his audience about God. He also calls them to turn from false gods to the true God. He does this in the last two verses of his speech, verses 30-31:

³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because 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.”

Now Paul says two more things that the Greeks need to know. First, now God calls all nations to repent. In the past, he did not pour out his wrath on people the way that he could have. People were still guilty because they knew from creation that God exists (Rom. 1:19-20). Yet now that

⁵ Aratus, *Phainomena*, quoted in F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 339.

Jesus has come and has risen from the grave, there really is no excuse at all. The time for repentance is now.

Second, God will one day judge the world through one man whom he has appointed. Though he doesn't name Jesus, this is who Paul is talking about. The God-man, Jesus, will judge the world on a day that God has fixed, and the proof of this is Jesus' resurrection. This would have offended the Epicureans because they didn't believe in resurrection or judgment. Also, the Stoics didn't believe that history was moving to one final judgment. Instead, they thought of history as moving in cycles. But Christianity teaches that human history as we know it is limited. It hasn't existed forever and it won't go on forever. And it's moving in a linear fashion, to a day when Jesus will return to judge everyone who has ever lived and to make all things new.

To sum up what we've seen so far: Since these men in Athens didn't know the Old Testament, Paul had to explain the story of God to them. He explained the major points of the Christian worldview. He tells them about God, creation, humanity and our sin. Paul doesn't actually mention Jesus' name or his sacrifice on the cross, but he does talk of Jesus' resurrection. Since Luke only gives us a summary of what he actually said, we don't know if Paul mentioned these things. It's possible that Paul wanted first to tell the Athenians about God and judgment so that they would be ready to be told about Jesus.

How did Paul's audience respond? Let's see. We'll read verses 32-34:

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

As I said earlier, these men in Greece didn't believe in resurrection or a final judgment. So when Paul gets to that point, some people mock him. Others say they want to hear more about this from Paul. It's possible they were sincere, but it's also possible that they were politely rejecting Paul. But after Paul leaves this council, some people follow him. Perhaps Paul taught them more about what Jesus accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. What's certain is that these people come to believe his message. One member of the council, named Dionysius, puts his faith in Jesus. A woman named Damaris, who was probably in the marketplace and overheard what Paul was saying to the council, also believes, along with others. We should expect that when we share the gospel, some will mock us. Others may say, "Well, that's a great story. Hey, I've got to

run now. We can talk about this later.” And others will come to faith. That last group of people may be small. Still, we need to keep telling people about Jesus.

Now that I’ve covered what Paul says, I want to spend some time thinking about how we can explain the Christian message and worldview to others.

Like Paul, we can’t assume people know the Bible. So we’ll have to explain who God is. We’ll have to say that he is self-existent, that he doesn’t need anyone else or anything. We’ll have to explain that God created everything else, including us, that we might worship him. We’ll have to speak about sin, or perhaps we can talk about our rejection of God in terms of idolatry. God made us for himself, but we make other things ultimate in our lives. We’ll have to explain how chasing other things doesn’t make sense. In other words, we’ll have to explain why other beliefs are irrational. And we’ll have to talk about who Jesus is, how he lived a perfect life, and yet he died on the cross to pay for the sins of very imperfect people like you and me.

When we tell people about this, I’m sure we’ll get challenged by others. I think there are many points at which we’ll get challenged. Some people will reject the idea that God created the universe, or that God specifically created human beings. Some people may reject the idea of the very existence of God. Others might reject the idea that there is only one way to know and relate to this God. Others will reject the idea of judgment.

I can’t address all these issues now, so I want to speak to just two of them, to show how we can demonstrate that the Christian worldview makes better sense of who we are as human beings.

A number of people believe that science has proven that we have descended from lesser species through the process of genetic mutations and natural selection. In other words, people believe that some form of Darwinian evolution is the true creation story. Therefore, the Bible can’t be true.

There are a number of things we can say to that. It’s possible to point out the flaws in Darwin’s own theory. Darwin was aware that the fossil record as had been discovered in his day didn’t support his theory that all life evolved from a simple organism. But he assumed that other fossils would be found that would prove him right. Yet that hasn’t happened. In fact, the biggest fossil discoveries show that long ago there were many organisms with different body types that

seemed to have sprung up at the same time. This is a complex subject, but you can read about it in Stephen Meyer's excellent book, *Darwin's Doubt*.⁶ We have a copy of the book in the library.

Another scientific problem with any form of macroevolution—the idea that all of life can be explained by evolution—is how the mechanism of evolution actually works. Neo-Darwinian theories of evolution state that the DNA of organisms has mutated in some way, and that some of these mutations have been advantageous. The animals with the advantageous mutations were able to breed more and therefore they passed on their genes more rapidly than the animals without those mutations. The problem is that in almost every case, genetic mutations are negative. Only in small cases, like when bacteria evolve to resist antibiotics, do they help an organism. Furthermore, the chances of there being enough mutations to produce large-scale evolution are tremendously small.

Think about this: If birds evolved from dinosaurs, somewhere along the line, those dinosaurs would have to develop wings. That means new body parts would be created. And the building blocks of organisms are proteins. The chances of genetic mutations producing one short protein 92 amino acids in length has been calculated to be 1 to 10^{63} . That's one out of one followed by sixty-three zeros. To put that into perspective, consider that there are only 10^{65} (one followed by sixty-five zeros) atoms in the Milky Way. Therefore, the chance of a genetic mutation producing one small protein is “roughly equal to the probability of a blind spaceman finding a single marked atom by chance among all the atoms in the Milky Way galaxy.”⁷ And that's just the chance of producing a stable protein, not one that actually functions. The chance of a mutation producing a functional protein of 150 amino acids is 1 in 10^{77} , or “one chance in one hundred thousand, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion.”⁸ In other words, the probability is pretty much zero.

I admit that this is a very complex subject, and it's hard to talk about quickly. If you want to read more about it, I posted a paper I wrote comparing two books on evolution and Intelligent Design on our website. You can find it at wbcommunity.org/articles.⁹

Most of us won't be able to deal with scientific issues very well. But we can point out the absurdity of believing that human beings are the product of a mindless, unguided process of

⁶ Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁹ Specifically: <http://wbcommunity.org/two-views-evolution>.

evolution. Randy Alcorn, a pastor and writer, compares an atheistic creation story with the Christian one and asks his audience if it matters which one is true.

In the secular account, “You are the descendant of a tiny cell of primordial protoplasm washed up on an empty beach three and a half billion years ago. You are the blind and arbitrary product of time, chance, and natural forces. You are a mere grab bag of atomic particles, a conglomeration of genetic substance. You exist on a tiny planet in a minute solar system in an empty corner of a meaningless universe. You are a purely biological entity, different only in degree but not in kind from a microbe, virus, or amoeba. You have no essence beyond your body, and at death you will cease to exist entirely. In short, you came from nothing and are going nowhere.”

In the Christian view, by contrast, “You are the special creation of a good and all-powerful God. You are created in His image, with capacities to think, feel, and worship that set you above all other life forms. You differ from the animals not simply in degree but in kind. Not only is your kind unique, but you are unique among your kind. Your Creator loves you so much and so intensely desires your companionship and affection that He has a perfect plan for your life. In addition, God gave the life of His only Son that you might spend eternity with Him. If you are willing to accept the gift of salvation, you can become a child of God.”¹⁰

Which of those two stories gives our lives meaning? Which of those two stories causes us to think that all human lives are valuable? The atheistic story would have us believe that we are personal, intelligent beings who are the products of an impersonal, unintelligent process. Christianity says that we are personal, intelligent beings, but that we were made by a personal, intelligent God who designed the universe so that life would be possible on earth, and that we would be his prize possessions.

In fact, the whole idea of human rights comes from the Judeo-Christian worldview. And everyone seems to care about human rights. I think that’s one way that we can be like Paul. If we find people talking about human rights, or about treating everyone with dignity and respect, we should say that we care about that, too. But we should also point out that apart from a view that says that God made all human beings in his image and likeness, and that he loves all humans, the idea of human rights doesn’t make sense. The atheist doesn’t have a good reason to believe that all human beings should be treated equally. If you believe that evolution is the true creation story, you believe that it is the fittest who survive. Therefore, there is no compelling reason to protect the weak. In fact, protecting the weak would actually interrupt the process of evolution. That sounds ugly, but that was Darwin’s own view.

¹⁰ Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great About Christianity?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007), 17-18.

Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) most famous book is *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), but he wrote another work called *The Descent of Man* (1871), in which he proposes theories about human evolution. His encounters with the natives of Tierra del Fuego, off the southernmost tip of South America, led him to believe that civilized humans evolved from lesser "savages," as he called them. These are Darwin's own words about "the civilised races of man"—in other words, white Europeans—and "savages":

At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world.¹¹

It's not surprising that Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, was a pioneer in eugenics, a term that he himself coined. Eugenics was a pseudoscience that claimed that the human race could be improved by controlling who had children. In other words, better breeding could lead to a better human race. This is how one author described eugenics:

Because eugenics was based on Darwinian theory, many eugenicists feared that modern institutions, such as medicine and social welfare, were spawning biological degeneration among humans. By softening the struggle for existence, modern society allowed the "inferior" to reproduce. The purpose of eugenics was to reverse this degenerative trend so humans could foster evolutionary progress instead.¹²

Eugenics was the natural consequence of the belief that we were created by the impersonal, uncaring, unintelligent process of variation, mutation, and natural selection. And it was embraced by Hitler, no friend of human rights.

Since atheists cannot appeal to God for the concept of human rights, they may claim that humans have rights because they have certain abilities or capacities, like intelligence, or the ability to think rationally. But what about infants? What about elderly people who have dementia. What about the mentally handicapped? If human rights are based on intelligence, do these people not have rights?

Others would say that human rights don't actually exist in nature, but that we have invented the concept of human rights because life just seems to go better when we protect each

¹¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2300/pg2300-images.html>>, accessed August 7, 2015. It's worth noting that the full title of Darwin's earlier book is *The Origin of Species, by means of Natural Selection; or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

¹² Richard Weikart, "Science, Eugenics, and Bioethics," in *Evidence for God*, ed. William A. Dembski and Michael R. Licona (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 97.

other. In other words, these people may say that the idea of human rights is sort of a useful fiction. There are no human rights, but we pretend there are human rights.

Consider the atheist philosopher Michael Ruse. He writes, “I believe that the most important thing we can know about human beings is that we are not the creation of a good God on the sixth day but the end product of a long, slow process of natural selection.”¹³ He says he believes that “we are genetically determined to believe that we ought to help each other.”¹⁴ But he also says that there is no real moral law that requires us to help each other and love each other. These ideas “are simply psychological beliefs put in place by natural selection in order to maintain and improve our reproductive fitness.”¹⁵ So these beliefs do not reflect some kind of moral reality. They’re just useful psychological beliefs.

But now that scientists have discovered that alleged truth, why should we continue to act as if there is a real moral law that is transgressed when people are treated poorly? This past week was very troubling for different people. A number of people were shot and killed. At least some, if not all, were innocent. There has been, in general, a lot of mourning and grieving and fear. Fear is understandable in the evolutionary worldview. We fear our lives are in danger, and that fear can help us survive. But why should we lament about the loss of human life? If the grand story of evolution were true, we should expect that people would be violent. We should expect nature to be “red in tooth and claw” (as Alfred Lord Tennyson put it) and life to be “nasty, brutish, and short” (as Thomas Hobbes put it). But when people see that innocent people are killed, they act as if an objective moral law has been transgressed. They act not as if an animal has died, but as if a special creature, one created by God, has had its life terminated.

I agree with the Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, who states, “It is impossible to develop a secular account of human dignity adequate for grounding human rights.”¹⁶

And the point of that discussion is to say that we can act like Paul when people talk about human rights. We can say, “You care about human rights? I do, too. Do you know why we have human rights? It seems that your own beliefs don’t account for real human rights. Let me tell you about the worldview that does account for human rights.” We can use that as a point of contact to tell people the truth.

¹³ Michael Ruse, “Naturalist Moral Nonrealism,” in *God and Morality: Four Views*, ed. R. Keith Loftin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 325.

Another part of the Christian message and worldview that people don't like is judgment. They don't like the idea of a God who would judge and condemn anyone. But think about this: If there is no judgment, there is no meaning in life. Let me explain: Very soon, the Summer Olympics will begin. That means there will be athletes who have trained for years for the chance to win medals. Imagine if, at the end of every event, it was announced, "There are no winners of this event. And there are no winners. There are no medals being awarded." The athletes would be stunned. They would be shocked. They would think, "What's the point of all my training?" Imagine more specifically a gymnast, who has been training almost her whole young life for the opportunity to win the gold medal. She performs her routine and then finds out that no judges were watching her. She is therefore awarded no points. She finds out there is no medal to win, and there is no standard for judging whether she gave a good performance. No one capable of evaluating her performance was watching. Therefore, her performance was pointless.

That's what life would be like without judgment. If there is no judge, there is no evaluation of how you have lived. There's no determining that your life was good or bad. There is no evaluating whether the actions you have performed were right or wrong. So though people don't like the idea of being judged, it's actually very connected to the meaning of life.

Also, the fact is that all human beings are judgmental. We all make moral judgments. If you want to see this in action, just get on the Internet. There is nothing more judgmental than an Internet mob, condemning this person or that person for their sins. Each one of us makes moral judgments. Where do we get that from? If there is no God, there is no objective moral law that is transgressed. And if there is no objective moral law that people break, why should we be so judgmental? If there is a God, there is an objective moral law. And since God is the judge, and we are made in his image and likeness, it makes sense that we would intuitively have a sense of moral judgment. Our moral judgments, whether they are right or wrong, are proof for the existence of God.

We can also use that idea as a way of introducing the unknown God to people who need to know him. Because the truth is that God is a judge. And one day the Son of God will return to judge the living and the dead. And everyone will be judged based on either what they have done, or what Jesus has done. If we say, "God, we don't need you. We're doing fine without you. We don't even believe you exist," we'll be judged for our moral performance. And if we're being honest, we know that all of us have fallen short of even our own standards. But we can say to

God, “I know I’m a very flawed person who has made countless mistakes. Though you made me to know you and worship you, and though you’ve been right in front of me all this time, I have acted as if you don’t exist. I have rejected the very reason I’m alive. Please forgive me. Please don’t judge me for what I’ve done. When you look at me, please look at your Son. He is perfect. He has never done anything wrong.” If we say that to God, then we’ll be judged based on Jesus’ moral performance. Our sin was punished when he died on the cross. And we are credited with his righteousness, his right standing before God.

If you’re here today and you’re not a Christian, this is the message of Christianity. There is more to say, of course. But when you come to the end of your life, you can’t say, “I never heard about God. I didn’t know this was true.” You have heard true things about God and the world that he has made. You are responsible for this knowledge. What are you going to do with it? Will you run to this God and put your trust in Jesus? Or will you run from this God and rely on yourself? The choice is yours today.

To the Christians, I would encourage us all to be more like Paul. We need to know the Christian worldview and message. And we need to understand how non-Christians think and believe. We need to understand that people who aren’t Christians will hold some true beliefs. We need to look for those truths and say, “You believe that? I do, too. But here’s why I believe it.” In other words, we need to point them to the truth. We need to point them to the “God who made the world and everything in it.”