

The Church Is United in Love

Summary and Goal

In the previous session, we learned how the early church settled an important doctrinal dispute in order to protect the gospel and maintain unity as a church in an essential doctrine—the doctrine of justification. In this session, we will explore how the church is united in love to fulfill the mission Jesus has given us: to proclaim the gospel to all peoples everywhere and make disciples of them. But to do that, we need to be burdened for the lost. Being burdened for unbelievers, however, is not enough. If we are to share the love of Christ with unbelievers, we must also develop a clear strategy where we build points of contact in order to establish a Christian worldview and then share the gospel and call for a response.

Session Outline

1. A heart is burdened for others (Acts 17:16-21).
2. A point of contact is made (Acts 17:22-29).
3. The gospel is proclaimed (Acts 17:30-34).

Background Passage: Acts 15:36–18:22

Session in a Sentence

God calls His people to love the people around them and build bridges with them to share the gospel.

Christ Connection

Paul arrived in Athens to avoid troublemakers in Berea, but while he was there, his heart was stirred by the idolatry of the Athenians. Paul did not miss any opportunity to preach the gospel to those who needed to hear it. Paul was following the example of Jesus, who, out of love, served others and sacrificed Himself for them.

Missional Application

Because we are loved by God and have been saved through His gift of Jesus, we strive to be aware of the spiritual needs of others around us and, out of love, faithfully share the gospel in relatable ways.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraphs on page 103 in the DDG to quickly compare our culture with the religiously pluralistic Roman Empire of the first century.

The Roman Empire was a religiously pluralistic empire. The Roman authorities had no problem with multiple religions and regional faiths. They were tolerant of groups and sects so long as they also were willing to worship the Roman gods and honor the Roman emperors.

We too live in a religiously pluralistic society, where you may worship whomever you please and “all roads lead to heaven.” What is not tolerated in this “age of tolerance,” however, is the exclusive message of the gospel, namely, that there is salvation in no other name but Jesus (Acts 4:12). If we are to share the gospel in this culture, we need to do the hard work of constructing a Christian worldview carefully and methodically because many in our culture have no clue who Jesus really is and what it means to be His follower.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What do you find most difficult about sharing the gospel in today’s culture? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: It’s true that there was a time when most Americans had a basic understanding of God, sin, Jesus, and salvation. An evangelist could stand on a street corner and yell, “Repent!” and most Americans had an understanding of what he meant. But that’s no longer the case. Therefore, to share the gospel, we must first find a point of contact and present the Christian worldview.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will explore how the church is united in love to fulfill the mission Jesus has given us: to proclaim the gospel to all peoples everywhere and make disciples of them. But to do that, we need to be burdened for the lost. Being burdened for unbelievers, however, is not enough. If we are to share the love of Christ with unbelievers, we must also develop a clear strategy where we build points of contact in order to establish a Christian worldview and then share the gospel and call for a response.

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Point 1: A heart is burdened for others (Acts 17:16-21).

READ Acts 17:16-21 (DDG p. 104).

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed when he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, “What is this ignorant show-off trying to say?”

Others replied, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities”—because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ They took him and brought him to the Areopagus, and said, “May we learn about this new teaching you are presenting?” ²⁰ Because what you say sounds strange to us, and we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to highlight Paul’s unique motivation for preaching the gospel in Athens—he was distressed in his heart because he was in a city full of idols.

No matter where Paul found himself, he kept sharing the gospel. As was his custom, he went to the local Jewish synagogue first, and then he would preach to the Gentiles (17:2,17). In Athens, Paul had a unique motivation for his evangelism—he was distressed in his heart because he was in a city full of idols. He was surrounded by a city full of deceived people, and he became jealous for the glory of the Lord. When anything or anyone steals God’s glory, we should be jealous for God alone to receive glory and worship. This should also be our fuel for evangelism and missions.

- The word translated “distressed” in this context means “to become irritated or angry.” Paul was distressed that the Athenians’ religious pluralism denied God the glory due His name, so he reasoned with the Jews first (synagogue) and then the Gentiles (marketplace). Likewise, our mission is to proclaim the good news of God’s glory in His eternal plan that culminates in the exaltation of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. We are to announce that Jesus is King and call all peoples to repent (turn away from their sins) and believe (place their trust in King Jesus for salvation).

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 104).

Evangelism: It is the duty and **privilege** of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make **disciples** of all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by **verbal** witness undergirded by a Christian **lifestyle**.

Essential Doctrine “Evangelism”: It is the duty and **privilege** of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make **disciples** of all nations. The new birth of man’s spirit by God’s Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all thus rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by **verbal** witness undergirded by a Christian **lifestyle**.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to highlight that just as the gospel sounded strange to the Athenians, it will sound strange to many who hear our proclamation and evangelism.

Because Paul’s gospel is our gospel, it too will sound strange in a religiously pluralistic culture. It sounds strange because, unlike man-made religion and philosophy, God Himself takes the action to save humanity. It sounds strange because it argues for an exclusive path to God: faith alone in the crucified and resurrected Jesus alone. Still, some people will be open to hearing us out, just as they were with Paul.

- As in Paul’s day, secular and religious authorities today reject the notion that there is salvation only in Jesus. Instead, the world’s powers embrace and promote a gospel of religious pluralism, the idea that all roads lead to heaven, salvation, or enlightenment. For this reason, our secular authorities welcome religious pluralism. The idea that only Jesus saves is offensive, so they try to silence and shut down—through ridicule or force—the message of salvation in Jesus. Still, as we learn in this passage, we must be prepared to share the gospel even in the face of religious pluralism.

Commentary: The **Epicureans** were akin to scientific materialists. They rejected the idea that the gods interfered in the world and held that history is guided by chance. Their highest virtue was attaining the good life, namely, enjoying moderation in all things. Of course, that was most important to them because they didn’t believe in the afterlife. They are reminiscent of agnostics in our day.

The **Stoics** were rationalists. They believed that the universe is essentially rational and developing in a rational, linear way. They wouldn’t have had a problem with Jesus *per se* because they believed in many gods. But they also believed in a supreme being ruling over all. Their supreme being was immanent, or close, not transcendent. They were essentially pantheistic—“God is all.” And for them, history was guided by fate. Their highest virtue was to live in line with the rational unfolding of the universe: to accept fate.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some of the challenges to sharing the gospel where you live and work? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

Point 2: A point of contact is made (Acts 17:22-29).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 17:22-29 (DDG p. 105).

²² Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. ²³ For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. ²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. ²⁷ He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is 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 also his offspring.’ ²⁹ Since we are God’s offspring then, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to point out how Paul began constructing a Christian worldview for his hearers based on the point of contact of their religiosity.

Before Paul explained the gospel to the Athenians, he took some time to construct a Christian worldview using accessible terminology. Paul began by establishing a point of contact (v. 22). Instead of beginning with condemnation—“You’re all going to hell for idolatry!”—he began by acknowledging their religious desires. The work of constructing a Christian worldview is not “angry work.” It’s slow, hard work.

Voices from the Church

“The challenge of worldview evangelism is not to make simple things complicated but to make clear to others some fairly complicated things that we simply assume.”¹

—D. A. Carson

- The Athenians were religious and thus fearful of the wrath of the gods. They didn’t want to make any god mad by leaving him or her out of the picture. Paul picked up on this and began to explain to them who the “unknown” God really is. He didn’t start with Jesus. Paul began with the biblical view of God (vv. 24-25): He is the Creator and sovereign Lord of all things.
- Paul added the biblical view of humankind (vv. 26-28): all the peoples of the world come from one man; therefore, all are equal before God. Not only were we created by this God, but He sustains us with everything we need. Even our history and geography, when and where we live, are guided by Him. This God made us to seek Him, for we are “God’s offspring,” made His image (see Gen. 1:26-27).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What truths are fundamental to a Christian worldview? (there is a God; God is the Creator and Sustainer of everything; humanity is created as body and soul, in the image of God, and dependent upon Him; human beings have sinned against God; Jesus is our only salvation from God's just judgment)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to show how Paul simultaneously presented a Christian worldview and worked to tear down the false worldviews of his hearers.

Paul didn't only present a Christian worldview; he also worked to tear down the confused, incorrect, false worldviews of his hearers. By presenting the biblical view of God as the one true God, Paul directly confronted the Athenians' ideas about their gods. He did not use the statue to the "unknown god" to lead them to think they were already worshiping the true God in ignorance. He used the statue to introduce them to a radically new understanding of God, the "I AM" of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- The Greek and Roman gods needed the people's worship. In their mythology, one of the main reasons the gods became angry was because the people refused or forgot to worship them. To appease their gods, they built temples (for sacrifices) and made statues so that the gods would not be forgotten. But Paul taught that the one true God is both transcendent (beyond us and independent of us) and infinite (not limited by space, thus, omnipresent). Idols cannot represent Him and temples cannot contain Him. So, the Athenians' whole system of worship was misguided.
 - Paul also tore down the Athenians' worldview regarding humanity and history. The Epicureans looked to chance to determine when and where they lived; the Stoics looked to fate. But the Christian God is the One who determines where and when we live (v. 26). History, then, is not purposeless, as the Greeks believe, and humanity has a purpose as well—we were made to seek God. He cannot be found through our own wisdom and knowledge, but He has made us in His image so that we may seek Him.
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What are some tenets of false worldviews that must crumble to see the glory of God in Christ? (we can make ourselves acceptable to God; God is a reflection of who we are; sin doesn't really exist or is not that big of a deal; there is no God; this world, universe, physical existence is all there is)

SAY: The work of building a Christian worldview and tearing down false worldviews takes a lot of effort. It requires diligence and thoughtfulness, patience and compassion. And if we're to share the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world, we should do this hard work as we are able. Still, we must get to Christ, that is, we must still preach the gospel as the solution to what's truly wrong with the world.

Point 3: The gospel is proclaimed (Acts 17:30-34).

READ Acts 17:30-34 (DDG p. 106).

³⁰ “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him, but others said, “We’d like to hear from you again about this.” ³³ So Paul left their presence. ³⁴ However, some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) to point out that Paul’s efforts earlier in his speech were to get to this point to proclaim Jesus as the Savior from God’s wrath for all who repent and believe.

Paul began with the God who creates and sustains all things, and he closed with the God who judges through His appointed man—Jesus, His Son whom He raised from the dead. All the preparatory work of building and tearing down that Paul did was to get to Christ. Though the Athenians were ignorant of the one true God, He had not judged them yet, as they would have feared from their own gods. Why? Because God is a God of mercy, and in His patience, He has now called all peoples to repent.

- The reason all people die is because the wages of sin is death, a consequence we all have inherited from Adam (Rom. 5:12; 6:23). Jesus, however, never sinned, and He paid our penalty for sin by dying on the cross in our place (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). Having raised Him from the dead, God the Father vindicated His Son, Jesus, whose righteous life and sacrifice on behalf of repentant sinners purchased our salvation (Rom. 4:25). Now, according to Paul, because God has judged sin in Jesus and has also provided new life in Jesus, all who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus alone for salvation will be saved from God’s wrath on the day He has set for final judgment.

Application: All the work of establishing a Christian worldview and tearing down false worldviews is for nothing if we don’t get to Christ. Sometimes we confuse evangelism with other good things. Sharing your testimony may be encouraging to some, but this by itself is not evangelism. Many religious sect and cult members share their “testimony” of how they discovered the “truth” or “saw the light.” Answering people’s apologetic questions is helpful, but this by itself is not evangelism either. Apologetics prepares the way for evangelism by removing obstacles to belief in Christ. But in dealing with questions, we must get to Christ. This is evangelism—sharing the saving message revealed by God the Father through the Holy Spirit about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) to highlight the various responses we may receive from people as we share the gospel. Emphasize that our calling is to be faithful to share the good news; God is the One responsible for the fruitfulness.

When we tell people about Jesus, we must also call for a response. If you're concerned with how people will respond to you when you share Christ, just look at how they responded to Paul. Some remained skeptical and likely rejected the gospel. Some were curious, however, and asked to hear more about what Paul was sharing. And finally, some with whom Paul shared the gospel believed. It may take some time and some effort and difficult work to be faithful to God's call, but trust the Lord for fruitfulness.

- Evangelism is hard. For many, it's frightening. Why? One reason is because we're afraid of rejection. When we are afraid of how people will respond to us sharing the gospel, we need to remember that God calls us to leave the results to Him. Our responsibility is simply to tell the good news—and it is good news!

Application: Evangelism often is a process that unfolds over time and over many conversations. Take your time. Be prayerful. Answer questions. Ask clarifying questions about where they are in their understanding and what they believe, in other words, their worldview. Eventually, though, you will want to ask them two key questions: (1) Is what you believe, your worldview, logically consistent or is it self-contradictory? (2) Does what you believe, your worldview, make sense of the world we live in? Every worldview must answer these two questions: the question of internal (logical) coherence and the question of external (empirical) correspondence. The point of our worldviews is to make sense of the world in which we live. If they do not correspond with our experience of the world or if they are self-contradictory, they will not be satisfying. Christianity is the only truly satisfying worldview. In sharing the gospel in a pluralistic world, we must make that case. All God asks of us is faithfulness; He is the One who ensures the fruitfulness.

PACK ITEM 12: JESUS IS PERMANENT: Read the **Raechel Myers quote** on this poster and ask group members the following question.



What are some ways the Christian worldview and the gospel, in particular, help make sense of the world and provide meaningful hope for people? (all of creation operates on a cause-and-effect continuum that must have had a beginning and a first cause—God, the Creator and Sustainer; the Bible explains that all of humanity is sinful and broken because of the sin of Adam, our common ancestor; human beings generally have a desire for justice when a wrong has been committed, and this desire reflects our Creator, who is a just and holy God; human beings generally feel guilt and shame when having done what is morally wrong according to God's law, whether they know that law or not; human beings generally have an innate desire for atonement to cover our wrongdoing; the gospel of Jesus Christ accounts for the reality of our sin, our sense of guilt and need for atonement, and provides hope that cleansing and salvation are realities we can enjoy in Christ)

My Mission

EXPLAIN: When the Lord gives us opportunities to share the gospel in a religiously pluralistic culture, we have to do the hard work of building up and tearing down, namely, building up a Christian worldview and tearing down competing worldviews. But if we're not careful, our worldview conversations will go on without an end in sight. At some point, we must get to Christ and call for a response. Some will reject Christ outright. Some will want to hear more. But others will believe. Keep sharing the gospel as the Lord gives you opportunities because evangelism is the responsibility of every Christian. We need to see evangelism as a normal activity rather than something done at "special events" and by "special people." When evangelism is perceived as normal, it becomes as normal as talking to your unbelieving family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and colleagues about the weather or sports, except that what we are talking about has eternal implications.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 107), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

Because we are loved by God and have been saved through His gift of Jesus, we strive to be aware of the spiritual needs of others around us and, out of love, faithfully share the gospel in relatable ways.

- **How will you address your greatest obstacles to making evangelism a normal part of life?**
- **What are some ways your group members can encourage one another to be regular and faithful evangelists?**
- **With whom will you share about the Christian worldview and the gospel of Jesus Christ, in particular?**



Voices from Church History

"Brethren, we must tell men that there is pressing need of a Saviour, and show them that we ourselves perceive their need and feel for them, or else we are not likely to turn them to the Saviour. He that pleads for Christ should himself be moved with the prospect of the judgment-day."²

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834-1892)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You have made every nation and determined the times and boundaries of where people live so they might find You, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Thank You for revealing Yourself in creation and for using us to declare to others who You are as revealed through the Scriptures and through Your Son, whom You raised from the dead and appointed to judge the world in righteousness. Help us to trust the Holy Spirit to open the minds and hearts of unbelievers as we share the truth about Jesus and our need to repent. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 108-110), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 111) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 111) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 2** as a part of point 1 in the session: **We can't open people's hearts like Jesus can, but we can open up the Scriptures in a way that people can understand them, *proving* from the Scriptures who Jesus is.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3:** "When sharing the gospel, it's important to understand with whom you're talking and begin where they are."
- **Day 4:** "Unlike their gods, who seem to get mad for no reason whatsoever, the one true God is a God of mercy."



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 111) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to share successful ways they've found to transition conversations with non-Christians to the gospel.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: A heart is burdened for others (Acts 17:16-21).

“Paul reaches Athens alone. This scene presents one of the more developed speeches of Acts. It is the most complete example of how Paul addresses a purely Gentile audience ... From the starting point of the one true God, Paul’s speech moves on to present Jesus’s uniqueness. But Paul does not complete his discourse. When Paul mentions the resurrection, the speech comes to a halt ... The passage has a simple structure. The introduction to the speech appears in verses 16-21, where Paul is disturbed at the number of idols, and the Athenians are portrayed as being open to hearing about any new thing. Paul’s speech, which covers vv. 22-31, moves from the ‘unknown god’ to the Creator to the one whom God has appointed to judge the world. At Paul’s mention of the resurrection, discussion and confusion ensue.”³

“Paul’s desire to preach the gospel led him to both the synagogue and the marketplace (17:17). He reasoned with Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and others whom he met at the marketplace. This mode of ministry was somewhat unusual, since Paul was now reaching three groups at once ... These philosophers [the Epicureans and Stoics] were not sure what Paul was speaking about, and referred to him as a babblers (literally, someone who had picked up scraps of knowledge) who was proclaiming strange deities (17:18b). They had never met anyone like him before. So they brought him to the Areopagus, an ancient court that had once governed Athens but now had other duties, one of which was arranging public lectures ... The philosophers sought to hear what Paul had to say, since they had heard strange things from him (17:19-20). They all wanted to hear something new (17:21), and Paul was ready to tell them some ‘all-important’ news. In doing so, he provided us with an example of the type of sermon he would have delivered to a Gentile audience.”⁴

Point 2: A point of contact is made (Acts 17:22-29).

“Paul, distressed at how much Athens was infested with idols, spoke in the synagogue and market-place, and was taken off to the Areopagus, the highest court there—not, then, for a philosophical debate, but on the dangerous charge of bringing foreign divinities into the city. Paul, starting by mentioning an altar he had seen dedicated to an unknown god,’ delivered one of the most memorable speeches, discoursing about God’s invisibility and providence, the call to repent of idolatry, and concluding with God’s appointment of Jesus to judge the world as witnessed by his resurrection. This speech was not so much translating the gospel into pagan language, as declaring the Jewish message of the one God, and its new Christian twist about Jesus as the risen lord and coming judge, into the ancient pagan philosophical context which Paul knew very well could not contain it. He was, in effect, offering a new way to talk about God and the world, a way focused on this Jesus. In the end, Paul gained a few converts, including Dionysius and Damaris, and then headed off to Corinth (17:16-34).”⁵

“Paul moves on to establish a *point of conflict*. In the synagogue Paul’s text was the Old Testament; in Athens it was an inscription (v. 23). A number of ancient visitors to Athens reported seeing altars with the inscription he mentions. Paul’s point of conflict was obvious: God has revealed himself! God is not unknowable. Paul’s speech then describes *the revelation of God* and how the problem is not that people *can’t* know God but that we *don’t want to* know him. Then Paul preaches about ‘what these things mean.’ D. A. Carson says that Areopagus speeches had a reputation for lasting a long time, as in two to three hours. With that in mind, it’s likely that every clause the Bible records here is just part of the outline. If we read the rest of Paul’s writings, however, we gain a pretty good clue as to how Paul would have filled in the rest. Paul essentially explains a Christian worldview here. He puts the gospel into the bigger story of the Bible, showing the reasonableness of the faith, the exclusivity of the faith, and the necessity of repentance and placing faith in the Redeemer. He shares several core beliefs embedded in the Christian story.”⁶

Point 3: The gospel is proclaimed (Acts 17:30-34).

“A call for repentance in this context provides ‘a vivid rebuttal of the position that a “natural revelation” is itself without need of correction and supplement.’ Indeed, Paul identifies the era in which they have been living as ‘the times of ignorance’ . . . recalling further the charge of ignorance in v. 23. He goes on to speak of what God now requires in the light of Christ’s coming. The two-age perspective of Jewish eschatology is thus adapted and applied to the Gentile situation. The present evil age is overtaken by the new age in Christ, in which salvation is made possible for Jew and Gentile alike. Although the speech has suggested possible areas of agreement between Paul and cultured Greeks, it has been full of challenge from a biblical perspective. No one is exempt from the call to repent, neither idolaters nor those who critique them . . . Paul says little about the epoch-changing significance of Jesus’ ministry other than to mention his resurrection as an assurance of the coming judgment (v. 31). He does not even explain that forgiveness is available through Jesus (cf. 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18), though the offer is implicit when God ‘commands all people everywhere to repent’ (cf. 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 20:21; 26:20). The divine challenge to turn back and seek a new start would make little sense and would carry little power if it did not include the possibility of reconciliation with God and cleansing from sin. Repentance for the Athenians would have meant turning to God from idols ‘to serve the living and true God’ (1 Thess. 1:9).”⁷

References

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6. Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2017), 253 [Wordsearch].
7. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) [Wordsearch].