

Running head: THE KERYGMA TO THE AREOPGAUS

Paul's Contextualization of the Gospel before the Areopagus in Acts 17

Philip J. Luca

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation  
in the Honors Program  
Liberty University  
Fall 2008

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

---

Don Fowler, Th.D.  
Thesis Chair

---

Donald Alban, Sr. D.Min.  
Committee Member

---

Robert Tucker, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

James Nutter, D.A.  
Honors Director

---

Date

Abstract

*The following thesis is an analysis on Paul's presentation of the gospel to the Areopagus as recorded in Acts 17:22-31. The reasons behind his drastic permutation of the kerygma will be scrutinized by studying the exposition of the main components of the speech in parallel with an analysis of his audience. The objective of the thesis is to investigate the Apostle's consistency with the orthodox kerygma as well as his interaction with the Gentile listeners. In conclusion, consequences for a relevant gospel presentation today will be proposed in light of Paul's homily to the Areopagite Council.*

Paul's Contextualization of the Gospel before the Areopagus in Acts 17

Paul's Kerygma

*The Kerygma*

*Definition.* The kerygma can be defined as “the proclamation of the good news in the [New Testament] and later. The word has become a quasi-technical term for the content of the early Christian polemic, the ‘gospel’ par excellence.”<sup>1</sup> Etymologically, it is the transliteration of the Greek noun usually translated “preaching” but indicating the *content* of the preaching more than the *act*. In the NT, it is the “gospel” or the “good news” of God’s redemptive activity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> In Pauline thought, the kerygma is the proclamation of the death of Christ to bring about salvation to all those who believe; it is the gospel message about Christ’s death and resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

*Paul’s explanation of the kerygma.* In Pauline thought, the kerygma has a particular nuance<sup>4</sup>. In Acts 9 and then in Acts 26, the Apostle’s conversion was more than repentance; it was a commissioning to the mission of Apostleship. Jesus appeared to Paul to appoint him as a servant and as a witness of what he had seen of Jesus and what He would show him later (Acts 26:16). Other passages further expound on what Paul meant

---

<sup>1</sup> John A., Freedman. "Kerygma." (*Eerdmans Dictionary Of The Bible*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 2000), 764.

<sup>2</sup> Paul J., Achtemeier. "Kerygma" (*The HarperCollins Dictionary*. San Francisco, CA : HarperSanFrancisco. Revised and updated edition, 1996), 564.

<sup>3</sup> Walter A., Elwell. "Kerygma." (*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker reference library, 1996), 444.

<sup>4</sup> For a survey of Paul’s kerygma in other passage in Acts before Ch. 17 see Appendix 1: Examples of the kerygma throughout Acts.

by the good news: in 1 Cor. 15:1-4 he explains that “the gospel [he preached is] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”; in addition, in Acts 26:20 Luke records that “[he] preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

From these passages<sup>5</sup>, it can be concluded that in the Pauline thought the essential elements of the gospel are: (1) repentance from worshiping idols to the worship of the true God; (2) forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ (His deity, death, burial and resurrection) and (3) proof of their repentance through changed behavior.

#### *Paul in Acts*

*Luke’s presentation of major steps in the development of the Church.* The book of Acts gives a broad perspective of the transition from the ministry of Jesus to the ministry of the Church through the Apostles. Luke secured the Church’s memories on how the transition from Jesus to the Church was effectuated.<sup>6</sup> As he attempted this laborious task, his presentation focuses on major events in the development of the early Church. Luke describes “how the band of [disciples] became thousands, how the truth they preached swept the world, and how the lonely prisoner had scattered fire up and down an empire.”<sup>7</sup> He records major events in the development of the Church and the speech to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Further evidence for this claim can be found in Appendix 1: Examples of the kerygma throughout Acts.

<sup>6</sup> C.K. Barrett. *Acts 15-28*. (The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. New York: T&T Clark LTD, 2004), cxii.

<sup>7</sup> Paul F., Barackman. (“Interpretation and communication : preaching from Acts.” *Interpretation* 13, no. 2 (April 1959). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 179.

Areopagus (constitutes such an event considering the length of the narrative assigned to this passage).

*Luke's use of Paul as a main character.* After concluding the critical account of the development of the early church in Jerusalem, Luke continues Acts with the testimony of Paul and his mission to the Gentiles.<sup>8</sup> The Church is depicted as expanding to new provinces through Paul's ministry, and in this manner, the incidents reported in the Apostle's journeys are focused on the development of the Church and its kerygma (not on what exactly happened from a historical or a biographical point of view). The account is not recorded for the achievements accomplished as much as for the significance it has in the development of the life of the Church depicted through Paul's ministry.

### The Speech

#### *Paul in Athens*

*Context.* Luke gives Paul's speech considerable length in his narrative. This detail indicates the fact that the Apostle's sermon to the Areopagus is important in the history of the development of the Church, and it needs to be recorded with greater detail than other events. Among other reasons why Luke would spend time depicting this narrative is the fact that this is the most complete account of Paul addressing an exclusively gentile audience.<sup>9</sup> In this homily, Luke gives an example of how the gospel interacts with other religions, through the preaching of the Apostles. Par excellence, "Christianity is depicted

---

<sup>8</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 570.

<sup>9</sup> Darrell L., Bock. *Acts*. (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 558.

in this episode in direct confrontation with pagan idolatry, Greek philosophy, and Athenian intellectual curiosity.”<sup>10</sup> An observation worth noting is: “[The] Areopagus narrative is not aimed at a monolithic Gentile audience but rather [it] engages multiple implied readers while recapitulating many of the leading lukan motifs in the mission to the Jews.”<sup>11</sup> Luke is not merely retelling the encounter between Paul and the Athenian population; rather he is using this narrative in the greater context of the book of Acts as a reinforcing example of the mission of the Church and the development of the kerygma. As such, the author most likely records this account only as a representative summary.<sup>12</sup> The selective and unsystematic nature of the speech presupposes two aspects: (1) that the speech merely mentions implicit details and (2) that it is apologetic, which aims to meet the hearer where he stands.<sup>13</sup> In the context of Acts 17, Paul's sermon is a special case of missionary apologetics at its best. As he gives an account of the deity he is preaching about, he is not explaining his message of Jesus, Lord and Savior; rather, he explains his concept of God.<sup>14</sup> This aspect of his kerygma brings about a lot of polemic, to the point that it is considered one of the most controversial speeches in the whole Scripture. Its

---

<sup>10</sup> Joseph A., Fitzmeyer. *The Acts Of The Apostles*. (Anchor Bible Commentary Series. New York: Doubleday, 1998), 601.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick, Gray. "Implied audiences in the Areopagus narrative." (*Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 2 (2004). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 205.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth O., Gangel. "Paul's Areopagus speech." (*Bibliotheca sacra* 127, no. 508 (October 1970). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 308.

<sup>13</sup> Colin J., Hemer. "The speeches of Acts : pt 1: The Ephesian elders at Miletus; pt 2: The Areopagus address." (*Tyndale Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (1989). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 253-254.

<sup>14</sup> Eckhard J, Schnabel. "Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world." (*Religion & Theology/Religie & teologie* 12, no. 2 (2005).. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 177-178.

format and text are considerably different from the Apostle's other speeches<sup>15</sup>, thus these differences have called forth criticism."<sup>16</sup> His homily to the Areopagus, must be viewed in light of the contemporary religious situation in Athens in the middle of the first century A.D. and against the background of the pluralistic and polytheistic religious life in the capital of Hellenism. Paul's sermon interprets the role of the Council of the Areopagus as guardians of traditional Athenian ways, the speech being characterized by both agreements and contradiction with the Greco-Roman philosophy.<sup>17</sup> As both the literal context in which this episode is inserted as well as the historical and ideological context of Paul's audience is properly analyzed, the intentions of the Apostle and his kerygma can be discerned responsibly.

*Setting.* The city Paul arrives in is but a shadow of its former glory. It did not have the influence that it once held, yet it is still esteemed as the cultural and intellectual center of the Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup> One of the greatest polytheistic nexuses, Athens sets the trends in issues of religion.<sup>19</sup> The Apostle is not in awe of the idols represented through astonishing works of art, rather he is vexed at the sight of this veritable forest of idols.<sup>20</sup> Following his usual pattern, the Apostle is "engaged in missionary work in this old

---

<sup>15</sup> For a comparative survey of other presentations of the gospel see Appendix 1: Examples of the kerygma throughout Acts.

<sup>16</sup> Gangel, "*Paul's Areopagus speech*", 308.

<sup>17</sup> Schnabel, "*Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*," 172.

<sup>18</sup> John B., Polhill. *Acts*. (The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 365.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce W, Winter. "On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20." (*Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 1 (1996). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 75.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 827, 828.

university town as he did in other cities.”<sup>21</sup> Paul argues with the Jews as well as with those who were willing to listen in the marketplace about Jesus<sup>22</sup> and the resurrection.<sup>23</sup> This method of approach is not at all unusual since philosophical discussions are a hallmark of Athens’ cultural life: Socrates was a model and the Stoa Poikile in the north side of the Agora was a prime site for such activities.<sup>24</sup> The Apostle’s approach is in accord with the local culture in the fact that “in the city of Socrates, Paul adapted to his audience both in style and content.”<sup>25</sup> For the Greeks, philosophical endeavors are aimed at teaching people how to live. This paradigm assumes that virtue is related through knowledge and is teachable, and reason is the means of attaining it.<sup>26</sup> Paul reasons with them using their cultural etiquette in order to get the message of the Gospel across; the Apostle’s aim in this discussion is not so much philosophical as theological. The religion of many Greeks especially among the educated is philosophy because it provides a criticism and reinterpretation of traditional religion while offering its own moral and

---

<sup>21</sup> Schnabel, *Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*, 172.

<sup>22</sup> Some considered Jesus and the resurrection (Anastasia) to be foreign gods; this religion was so new to them that they misunderstood the idea of resurrection, Paul being perceived more like a herald of new deities than a preacher. For more details, reference Bock, *Acts*, 562.

<sup>23</sup> The causal link (ὁτι) between the two clauses (Jesus and resurrection) and the emphatic position of "foreign divinities" suggests that 'Jesus and the Resurrection' are, in fact, the foreign divinities. "Jesus" could easily have been associated with Ἰησώ (or Ἰασώ), daughter of Aesculapius and goddess of healing. Ἀνάστασις, which would not have conveyed its Christian meaning to Greek philosophers, might also be construed as the name of a deity. For further research reference see Croy, *Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Schnabel, *Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*, 174.

<sup>25</sup> Ajith., Fernando. *Acts. The NIV Application Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 480.

<sup>26</sup> Everett., Ferguson. *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans, 1993), 303.

spiritual direction.<sup>27</sup> As Paul engages his mission of evangelization using the method of discussion, he arouses the interest of the Stoics and Epicureans.<sup>28</sup> It is critical to recognize these two philosophical schools, since Paul addressed their beliefs,<sup>29</sup> especially<sup>30</sup> those of the Stoics.<sup>31</sup> They desire to hear a more detailed presentation of Paul's teaching about Jesus and the resurrection in order for it to be assessed by the experts of the Areopagus.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the members of the Areopagus, there is also the Council of the 600 and the so called Demos, the congregation of the people of Athens. They would have witnessed the Apostle's address as well.<sup>33</sup> Paul initiates this theological

---

<sup>27</sup> Everett., Ferguson. *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans, 1993), 300.

<sup>28</sup> The rhetorical paradigm one has when reading Acts and the cultural details Luke mentions will inevitably have consequences on the way the speech is understood. Croy makes a good point in suggesting how this passage and the kerygma should be perceived: "If Paul did address a non Jewish audience in Athens, his message surely would have included so central an issue as Jesus' resurrection. The more difficult question is whether Luke could presuppose in his readers a sufficient knowledge of either Epicurean or Stoic philosophy for them to recognize a correspondence that is only implicit. The fact that the two groups are introduced in the narrative without explanation presupposes that they were widely known." In light of this explanation the focus of the article must be on the perception of the reader of the text as well as the text itself. The evaluation whether Paul preached a clear kerygma or not is affected in great measure by today reader's understanding of the method Luke used to narrate Paul's message. A thorough analysis of this passage cannot focus only on Paul' kerygma. An understanding of what Luke assumed his readers would know and understand of the cultural context (as well as familiarizing oneself with that cultural knowledge) is needed for a holistic comprehension of the intent of the passage. For further research reference see Croy, *Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> For and survey of the development of the concept of deity in Greek philosophy see Appendix 3.

<sup>30</sup> Croy argues that case that Stoicism undoubtedly has a greater affinity to biblical teaching than Epicureanism. For further research see Croy, *Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Dean., Flemming. "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication." (*Missiology* 30, no. 2 (April 2002): 199-214. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 200.

<sup>32</sup> F.F., Bruce. *The Book Of The Acts*. (The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans, 1998), 332.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce W, Winter. "On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20." (*Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 1 (1996): 71-90. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 87.

discussion, but the speech is a response to the invitation that the Greek philosophers extend to him and as such it would have had to be formulated to address their inquiry. Paul is perceived as a herald of new divinities, and if he gains popular support in Athens, he might have secured a rightful place for his God in the Athenian Pantheon. They are courteous to him since such a herald would normally be a person of status and financial standing. The introduction of a new cult involved buying a site, constructing an altar for sacrifices, providing an annual dinner to honor the gods, and supporting cultic officials.<sup>34</sup> Paul addresses not only the philosophers, but also the council of the citizens, the "men of Athens (v.22)." It is important to note who constituted his audience for an understanding of the critique of the popular Athenian religion in his speech, especially since the Areopagus is the very group that is responsible for religious matters.<sup>35</sup> As a continuation of a previous discussion, Paul's speech at Mars' Hill (Areopagus in Greek) must not be separated from his preaching activity in the marketplace.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Speech*

*Outline of the speech.* For a more detailed examination, the text will be divided in seven sections: (1). Summary of the speech, (2) Ignorance of the pagan worship (v.22-23), (3) God the Creator (v. 24-25), (4) Providential God (v. 26-27), (5) The Worship of God (v. 28-29), (6) The Judgment of God (v.30-31), and (7) The response (v. 32-34).<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Winter, "On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20," 87.

<sup>35</sup> Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication," 201.

<sup>36</sup> Schnabel, "Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world," 176.

<sup>37</sup> The outline was taken from Polhill, *Acts*.

*Ignorance of the pagan worship* (v.22-23). Paul starts his speech “facing both a curious and a critical audience.”<sup>38</sup> Some are aware of Paul’s earlier discussion in the agora about Jesus and the resurrection, while others gather as part of the congregation of the Areopagus. The Apostle’s speech is a continuation of his kerygma in the marketplace, but the audience he faces is partially different. In these conditions, he has to formulate his exposition in such a way as to be intelligible and relevant to his new listeners.<sup>39</sup> The opening part of the speech can be understood as acquiring the attention of the audience. Paul calls them “religious”: a term that is rather volatile at that time; “Although the negative connotation comes to predominate by the first century, the comparative adjective technically allows for either a negative or a positive sense.”<sup>40</sup> The expression can be taken ambivalently, basically favorable but with an ironical twist.<sup>41</sup> In other words, “the scholarly consensus [...] emphasizes Luke’s artful use of ambiguous religious language that can be read in either way, for either rhetorical or ironical purposes.”<sup>42</sup> The Athenians may have been flattered by the epithet but coming from Paul, it may suggest disapproval without prematurely antagonizing his audience.<sup>43</sup> From the beginning, it

---

<sup>38</sup> Karl Olav, Sandnes. "Paul and Socrates : The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech." (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (June 1993): 13-26. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Olav, Sandnes. "Paul and Socrates : The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech." (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (June 1993): 13-26. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 25.

<sup>40</sup> Gray, “*Implied audiences in the Areopagus narrative,*” 212.

<sup>41</sup> Hemer, “*The speeches of Acts : pt 1: The Ephesian elders at Miletus; pt 2: The Areopagus address,*” 245.

<sup>42</sup> Patrick, Gray. "Athenian curiosity (Acts 17:21)." *Novum testamentum* 47, no. 2 (2005). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 109.

<sup>43</sup> Gray, “*Implied audiences in the Areopagus narrative,*” 212.

seems that the Apostle consistently endeavors to have as much common ground as possible with his audience<sup>44</sup>, and an ambiguous term would be ingenious. Paul follows with an exposition of the “Unknown God” as a point of contact with the audience.<sup>45</sup> Greeks built altars to such gods because they are afraid of what might happen if they did not properly honor a local deity; by setting up altars and honoring the unknown gods, people could be sure that they are not unwittingly neglecting to honor one of the deities and would ensure benevolence and blessings.<sup>46</sup> In a tacit manner, the Apostle deflects the possible charge, or at least suspicion that he is advocating foreign dignities, and at the same time, he sets the stage to present Yahweh, the one and only God.<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that even though inscriptions “to the unknown gods” are known, none have yet

---

<sup>44</sup> Gangel, "Paul's Areopagus speech," 310.

<sup>45</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 371.

<sup>46</sup> Clinton, Arnold. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. Barrett, C.K.. *Acts 15-28*. New York: T&T Clark LTD, 2004), 392.

<sup>47</sup> Hoerber claims that as Socrates was sentenced to death partly for advocating new deities, Paul might have been viewed with the same suspicion. For further research reference Hoerber, Robert G. "Paul at Athens." (*Concordia Journal* 21, no. 2 (April 1995). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 203. In contrast Winter asserts that he could have been viewed as the legitimate herald of new deities and in this case his exposition would have been welcomed for the benefits that such a deity might have brought to the Athenians. For further research reference Winter, "On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20," 71. Considering the fact that Socrates lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (see Appendix 3) and that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Alexander the Great conquered the known world setting Hellenization in motion, a different approach should be considered. Dunham explains that “the cultural flow evidently included a steady procession of foreign deities, for by the time Paul stood in the markets of Athens, a great many religions were co-existent at the center of the Hellenistic world. Tolerance of foreign divinities was apparently quite remarkable. As people moved to Greece, they brought their gods with them, and they were welcomed. The Greeks, and later the Romans, rather than telling the immigrants that they would have to worship the Greek and Roman gods exclusively, adopted the practical solution of saying, "All right, you continue to worship your gods and goddesses, and we'll worship them, too—and you worship ours." That way, no one's god was slighted, and everyone was happy.” For further research reference Robert E., Dunham. "Acts 17:16-34." (*Interpretation* 60, no. 2 (April 2006): 202-204. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 202. In light of these comments the reasonable approach would be that Paul was viewed as the licit promoter of presumable new deities and was consequently not on trial.

been uncovered by the archeologists with the noun “god” in the singular.<sup>48</sup> There are critics that assert the fact that Paul took a certain degree of “homiletical license” in changing the inscription to the singular to fit his monotheistic argument;<sup>49</sup> however, “the Stoics and Epicureans would have had no difficulty with the use of the singular 'god'.”<sup>50</sup> The Stoics are essentially pantheist, and for them, God is the great logos, the unifying substance of the entire universe; whether named as Zeus or other gods, their concept of deity is rather fluid. On the other hand, the Epicureans might have not even sensed the change, since they have no regard for the worship of deity altogether, believing the gods to be separate from the world people live in. The phrase has a different impact on the incongruent audience: some fear neglecting an unknown God's anger while others like the Epicureans, believing in distant and disinterested gods, must have not shown much interest.<sup>51</sup> In this manner, the Apostle begins the speech in accord with popular Greek piety,<sup>52</sup> even though “the council members must have been somewhat perplexed after hearing Paul's polite introduction.”<sup>53</sup> The other masses of people present must have been intrigued as Paul starts from the known paradigms of the Greek religion and then continues to further develop the main idea of his message. In this case, the Apostle exhibits “remarkable rhetorical skill coupled with a precise knowledge of the mental

---

<sup>48</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 837-838.

<sup>49</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 371.

<sup>50</sup> Winter, “*On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20*,” 84.

<sup>51</sup> Hemer, “*The speeches of Acts : pt 1: The Ephesian elders at Miletus; pt 2: The Areopagus address*,” 245.

<sup>52</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 607.

<sup>53</sup> Schnabel, “*Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*,” 178.

frame of mind of his hearers; He [deals] tactfully with the religio-philosophical sensitivity.”<sup>54</sup> A survey of the speech reveals that he is aware of this perception of himself and exploits it, claiming not a new god but “declaring the nature of the God whose presence they had already recognized with the erection of an altar to him.”<sup>55</sup> At this point in the speech, it would have been natural to declare the name of the unknown deity, as to include the new god in the Parthenon if it was accepted, but Paul channels the expositions differently.<sup>56</sup> He seeks openings for a common ground that would have served as entry points that lead to the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>57</sup>

*God the Creator (v. 24-25).* Similar to the Jews, the Greeks believe that the creation of the universe is divinely caused. This Creator God would naturally be “Lord” of the heavens and the earth and the totality of creation, including mankind.<sup>58</sup> By saying that He does not live in a temple built by hands, the Apostle belittles the temples since anything built by man is inferior in contrast to that which is made by God.<sup>59</sup> The concept that God cannot inhabit such sanctuaries is found in both biblical and pagan sources and is a logical argument following that of creation; if He made everything, He cannot be contained by that which He has made. On the contrary, He sustains everything that has been created (since Zeus was the supreme god of the Parthenon was often considered the

---

<sup>54</sup> Gangel, *"Paul's Areopagus speech,"* 308.

<sup>55</sup> Winter, *"On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20,"* 89.

<sup>56</sup> Pascal P., Parente. "St Paul's address before the Areopagus." (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (April 1949): 144-150. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* ), 146.

<sup>57</sup> Michael, Rogness. "Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill." (*Word & World* 27, no. 3 (Sum 2007): 274-294. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 277.

<sup>58</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 840.

<sup>59</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 565.

origin of life) and the Apostle is comparing this “new god” with Zeus by saying that “life, and breath and everything” come from God.<sup>60</sup> What Paul is saying is that God has not only made the cosmos, the world and humans in it, but he also sustains them with life and breath and everything else. He does not just govern the vast creation; He is involved in the lives of the people He has created, sustaining and providing for their existence.<sup>61</sup> This argument implies that religious practices should not focus on serving God since He is Creator and cannot live in temples, nor can he be envisaged as needing service.<sup>62</sup> The Stoics, as taught by Zeno, believe that temples should not be erected to the gods since they cannot be enclosed in such buildings, nor do they need them.<sup>63</sup> The Epicureans have similar beliefs in that gods could not be contained by temples since they live in Heaven and not on earth. Schnabel emphasizes that:

“The critique of idols is a clear indictment of popular piety with which the Stoic and the Epicurean philosophers had come to an arrangement. Both philosophical schools had accommodated their theoretical convictions to the religiosity of the population so that people would be able to continue to participate in the cultic activities of the cities. Epicurus was convinced that popular piety was misguided, but he did not try to keep the adherents of his philosophy from participation in local cults. An Epicurean text, written around 50 G.E., asserts, on the one hand, that piety cannot be proved by the offering of sacrifices, but continues with the statement that offering to the gods is permitted since it is in agreement with religious traditions (P. Oxy 215). Plutarch accused the Stoics of contradicting themselves as they visited the mysteries in the temples and ascended the acropolis to honor the idol statues and lay down wreaths in the sanctuaries despite their convictions (*Mor.* 1034 B-G).”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Ben III, Witherington. *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 525.

<sup>61</sup> Rogness, “*Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill*,” 278.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 336-337.

<sup>63</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 608.

<sup>64</sup> Schnabel, “*Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*,” 181-182.

It must be noted that not everyone in the audience would have heard the speech the same way; Stoics and Epicureans, for example, would have agreed with Paul's parallels with their understanding of natural theology<sup>65</sup> while the polytheistic masses must have been intrigued and perplexed by his argumentation. Individually, these arguments make sense but when brought together the implications question the veracity of their entire religious history. These ideas are present in Hellenistic literature and culture but are segregated.<sup>66</sup> Paul presents them together as he makes the case for God. From his perspective though every statement that he makes is in Old Testament thought<sup>67</sup> even if he does not quote it as such. The Apostle's reference to God as Creator reflects, at least in a general way, his own OT background and faith.<sup>68</sup> It must be noted that even though Paul argues that the God he is presenting is perceived by the Greeks, this does not mean that God can be known from creation; He is known through revelation, the proclamation of the Gospel, God's creatorship being acknowledged through faith.<sup>69</sup> Paul agrees with some elements of general revelation<sup>70</sup> and uses those elements as stepping-stones in his kerygma.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Winter, "On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20," 89.

<sup>66</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 565.

<sup>67</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 372.

<sup>68</sup> Edward, Fudge. "Paul's apostolic self-consciousness at Athens." (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14, no. 3 (Sum 1971): 193-198. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost), 194.

<sup>69</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 840.

<sup>70</sup> Dunham suggests that Paul addresses not formal liturgies or dogmas or inquires about God, rather the unnamed hunger for meaning and purpose, stirred by the existence of human beings in this created cosmos. For further reference see Dunham, "Acts 17:16-34," 204.

<sup>71</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 479.

*Providential God* (v. 26-27). The continuation of the speech brings forth a new argument for the Greek audience and that is the provenience of all humanity from one man. It is a development of the idea that God is Creator. In some ways Paul agrees with the Stoics that humanity is one, but in disagreement that it is of common origin. The Greeks believe that they originate in the land of Attica and are part of a rebirth cycle.<sup>72</sup> The Apostle's intent is to show that all humanity is created by the sovereign God. This affirmation would have been difficult to accept for the Athenians who took pride in their superior race and called strangers barbarians.<sup>73</sup> It must be noted that the "making [of humanity] must be seen in relation to [its] dwelling and seeking."<sup>74</sup> In this view, the main purpose for creating humankind is not to inhabit various places in various seasons, but it is created to be in fellowship with God.<sup>75</sup> The fact that the times and zones where nations should dwell is divinely determined,<sup>76</sup> points toward the reality that God governs the affairs of men.<sup>77</sup> Humanity's purpose in this paradigm is to seek God. Paul describes the search of the Greeks as grasping, like a blind person or a person walking in the dark.<sup>78</sup> The Apostle points toward the ironical state of humankind: even though God is omnipresent and not far from the people He has created, people cannot know Him apart from divine revelation. The Apostle pointedly distinguishes religion from revelation,

---

<sup>72</sup> Witherington, *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 526.

<sup>73</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 566.

<sup>74</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 842.

<sup>75</sup> Witherington, *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 528.

<sup>76</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 609.

<sup>77</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 844.

<sup>78</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 567.

referring to common notions and contradicting those ideas that go against Scripture.<sup>79</sup> By emphasizing the Creator and creature chiasm, Paul differentiates his message from the Stoic belief that everybody has an innate relationship with God because they are His kin, the individual soul being connected with the universal soul. In that paradigm, idols are encouraged as a form of relating to God while the Apostle is highly distressed by the worship of idols.<sup>80</sup> Throughout his speech, Paul “knows how to confront, but does so honestly and graciously.”<sup>81</sup>

*The worship of God* (v. 28-29). The Apostle’s “deeper purpose was to confront and correct their understanding of God [...] not by overtly attacking specific pagan doctrines, but rather by positively confessing the God of the Scriptures.”<sup>82</sup> As a Jewish Christian, he realizes that the pagan Greeks do not worship the real God and in consequence starting from Athenian religious piety, he tries to raise them from their experience to a sound theology. Marshall explains that “what Paul was doing was to side with the philosophers, and then demonstrated that they did not go far enough.”<sup>83</sup> Fitzmeyer concurs on this point asserting that their piety is not as deep as it should have been.<sup>84</sup> Schnabel explains that up to that point in the speech:

---

<sup>79</sup> Schnabel, *Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*, 178.

<sup>80</sup> Witherington, *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 529.

<sup>81</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 573.

<sup>82</sup> Flemming, *Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication*, 204.

<sup>83</sup> Howard, Marshall. *The Book Of Acts*. (The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans, 1980), 282.

<sup>84</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 607.

“[The Apostle] pointed out that he was not the spokesperson of a god who wanted to acquire a piece of land in order to erect an altar or a sanctuary for the cultic veneration of his god. He argued that the god whom he proclaimed did not live in man-made temples (17:24) and did not need festivals: his god did not need to be served since he was the creator of all being (17:25-26). Paul asserted that he did not apply for the admission of a new deity to the pantheon of the city of Athens; [he] argued that the God whom he proclaimed [was] not far from each one of us' as the poets had already said (17:27-28); in other words, a God that did not need to be introduced formally because he was already 'here'.”<sup>85</sup>

The Apostle succeeds in portraying God as a personal, transcendent, and yet an immanent spiritual being.<sup>86</sup> It is interesting to observe that as Paul preaches to the pagans, there is no suggestion that the Athenians claimed ignorance, and how could they since they are so proud of their knowledge through philosophy. Some of their own teachers realize the folly of representing God through crafted images, sacrificing to these idols and storing them in temples. However dimly, they perceive that God is near to those who sought after him.<sup>87</sup> The Apostle is not resorting to a compromise; for him “the critical discussion of Greco-Roman pluralism is an essential element of his explanation and proclamation of the gospel.”<sup>88</sup> His kerygma enfolds upon the theology that he expounds through the speech, using notions of natural theology and Greco-Roman philosophy. Paul reasons with them because reason was their language. Using their own writings, he shows them the truth and its incompatibility with their “heathen” worldview. The climax of using Hellenistic elements is seen in the quotation of a Greek poet instead a quotation from

---

<sup>85</sup> Schnabel, *Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*, 178.

<sup>86</sup> Gangel, *Paul's Areopagus speech*, 311.

<sup>87</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 338.

<sup>88</sup> Schnabel, *Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*, 182.

Scripture.<sup>89</sup> In this passage, “Luke [describes] Paul citing pagan authorities in virtually the same way he cites Torah for the Jewish listeners.”<sup>90</sup> The Apostle tactfully breaks down their theology piece by piece as he builds up the case for the true God. Paul follows with a summing up of human existence: “‘We live’ referring to physical life, ‘have our being’ referring to spiritual-intellectual life; and ‘we move’ to a transfer of both to a cosmic level.”<sup>91</sup> Avoiding a pantheistic interpretation which would have been natural for the Stoics, Paul makes the case for a God who is accessible and personal.<sup>92</sup> The other quotation that he uses is from Aratus (Phaenomena 5) by which the Apostle implies that we are kin to God. Originally in this writing, Zeus is considered the Supreme Being (Bruce, 338-339),<sup>93</sup> but Paul redirects it in his speech toward the knowledge of the true God. He is the Creator and humankind is made in His image; worshiping idols who are created by humans and in their image is foolish. The Apostle attacks not only the activity of creating such objects of worship but also, the underlying assumption that deity is like a thing (a man-made object).<sup>94</sup> In “Catena On The Acts Of The Apostles“, Ammonius – one of the Church fathers – explains that in this passage, Paul preaches that “deity is absolutely undetermined, incomprehensible, without image, incorporeal, not similar to

---

<sup>89</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 603.

<sup>90</sup> Timothy Luke, Johnson. *The Acts Of The Apostles*. (Sacra Pagina Series. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 316.

<sup>91</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 610.

<sup>92</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 847.

<sup>93</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 338-339.

<sup>94</sup> Witherington, *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 530.

human form or any other thing.”<sup>95</sup> The Apostle’s “critique of idols is not merely a philosophical argument either [rather,] the critical discussion of Greco-Roman pluralism [is] an essential element of his [kerygma].”<sup>96</sup> Paul shows familiarity with their ancient traditions and drawing upon indigenous language, images, and ideas to make the kerygma relevant.<sup>97</sup> By using these quotations, he speaks in their slang while making one more step in his presentation of the gospel. Gangel explains that, the Apostle uses natural theology and not Scripture, for this would be intelligible to them. Paul’s approach on the other hand does not imply that he did not use the Old Testament<sup>98</sup>; in all actuality, he alludes to it frequently<sup>99</sup>. In the period that the Apostle preaches to the Athenians, the Church wrestles with the understanding of how “the gospel could be freed from an exclusive identification with Jewish culture and incarnated afresh into a predominantly Gentile environment.”<sup>100</sup> Paul tries to achieve this goal in his speech as he contextualizes the essentials of the gospel in Greek culture. He does not quote directly from the Old Testament as he does in his talk to Jews and God-fearers for such appeals would have

---

<sup>95</sup> Thomas, Oden. *Acts*. (Ancient Christian commentary on Scripture. New Testament. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 222.

<sup>96</sup> Schnabel, “Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world,” 182.

<sup>97</sup> Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul’s Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication,” 207.

<sup>98</sup> Appendix 2 offers a list of OT passages that Paul alluded to.

<sup>99</sup> Gangel, “Paul’s Areopagus speech,” 311.

<sup>100</sup> Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul’s Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication,” 199.

been irrelevant to his hearers who did not accept the authority of the Scriptures, even though the message is thoroughly scriptural based.<sup>101</sup> Witherington explains that:

“From a rhetorical point of view the function of the [...] quotations here is to cite an authority recognized by one’s audience to support one’s point. It would have done Paul no good to simply quote Scriptures, a book the audience did not know and one that had no authority in the minds of these hearers. Arguments are only persuasive if they work within the plausibility structure existing in the minds of the hearers.”<sup>102</sup>

Paul selects from the OT and Jewish theological and apologetic traditions, such motifs that could be easily understood by the Stoics and Epicureans including terminological allusions and quotations.<sup>103</sup> He does not create his own arguments then and there; defenders of Judaism have worked for centuries to make their faith philosophically respectable. As a scholar educated by the elite of Jewish scholastic, he uses the structures he learned and develops the case for Christianity to the pagan mind.<sup>104</sup> The thrust of the speech derives from Old Testament prophetic traditions<sup>105</sup> and contemporary Jewish apologetics. Rather than drawing on Greco-Roman philosophical traditions as a kind of preparation for the gospel, Paul uses them to expound his reliable theology.<sup>106</sup>

*The judgment of God (v.30-31).* After the Apostle portrays God as Creator and provider, the futility of worshipping idols and the frailty of man, he challenges his

---

<sup>101</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 476.

<sup>102</sup> Witherington, Ben III. *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans, 1998), 530.

<sup>103</sup> Schnabel, "Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world," 179.

<sup>104</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 477.

<sup>105</sup> Reference Appendix 2 for a list of passages from the OT that Paul might have alluded to.

<sup>106</sup> Schnabel, "Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world," 172.

audience to action. By presenting God as Creator and Judge, Paul emphasizes His Personality contrasting it with the pantheism of the Stoics. God's nature is explained by using their own terminology, as Paul gently exposes the inconsistency between the transcendent reality to which their thinkers aspire and the man-made images of Athens.<sup>107</sup> Despite his efforts to be sensitive to the contextual needs of his audience by being relevant to their worldview, an identificational approach can only have some points of contact (the Apostle is not pursuing just presenting points of contact); his "deeper purpose [is] to confront and correct their understanding of God at a fundamental level."<sup>108</sup> He is not agreeing with the Stoics who believed that man has knowledge of God, and then lost it. The Apostle affirms that man always had the option of knowing God but never materialized it. The call is not to add more knowledge to their already existing paradigms, for that would not suffice. The call is to a conversion of their worldview.<sup>109</sup> On the basis of his critique of contemporary religiosity, particularly the Greco-Roman pluralism of gods and cults, of temples and mysteries, Paul calls his audience to repent and turn to the one true God.<sup>110</sup> It must be noted that Luke uses the repentance not only as a change of thinking but also as an intentional action-oriented forsaking of sins which are forgiven by God as a result.<sup>111</sup> The God whom the Apostle proclaimed to the citizens of Athens is not just another deity that could be added to the pantheon. Paul does not want

---

<sup>107</sup> Hemer, *"The speeches of Acts : pt 1: The Ephesian elders at Miletus; pt 2: The Areopagus address,"* 244.

<sup>108</sup> Flemming, *"Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication,"* 204.

<sup>109</sup> Witherington, *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary,* 531.

<sup>110</sup> Schnabel, *"Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world,"* 182.

<sup>111</sup> Gray, *"Athenian curiosity (Acts 17:21),"* 115.

the council's legal agreement to the introduction of the God whom he proclaimed in the city: he wants them and everybody else to repent. Even though they have reasons to claim ignorance, they also have reasons to be blamed. The members of the council realize that they are no longer investigating Paul and his God, but that they are being 'investigated' themselves, including the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who permit the people to worship idols despite their teaching in which they questioned their veracity.<sup>112</sup> Even though they might have had a better concept of God than the polytheistic masses, the main challenge is the fact that the "unknown God" has just been presented to them, and they need to respond; the times of ignorance are over now, and the Athenians have to make a decision. It is rather bold to charge the intellectual Athenians with ignorance given their intellectual history.<sup>113</sup> However, this element in his argumentation further sustains the claim that the Apostle is not seeking the approval of the Areopagus or the masses. He is trying to convince them of the gospel. If the message Paul is proclaiming is merely one of reconciliation between Christianity and Greco-Roman philosophy, it is unlikely that he would challenge his audience to repentance. The change that he calls for is not a mere intellectual one but an existential one, for man is not guilty of just not knowing God but also of withdrawing from a relationship with Him. Even though nature has not inspired the Greeks to natural theology but to natural idolatry, it is not God's intent that they should continue in this state.<sup>114</sup> The Apostle presents more than the philosophical and logical argument for the necessity to abandon polytheism; he also

---

<sup>112</sup> Schnabel, *"Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world,"* 178.

<sup>113</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 569.

<sup>114</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 850-851.

establishes the necessity of changing religious convictions and cultic activities in view of the divine judgment 'by a man'.<sup>115</sup> His proposal is of "a change of mind and a break with the past."<sup>116</sup> In the Greek mindset, an eschatological judgment as the biblical revelation announces is irrelevant,<sup>117</sup> and further explanation must have been needed. It is unheard of that one man would be exalted to the role of universal judge and further proof is needed.<sup>118</sup> The speech begins with Jesus as the subject,<sup>119</sup> and as Paul alludes to "the appointed man", it can be understood that he is referring to the man in whom God's plan if fulfilled, the one who the Father has given "authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of man (John 5:27)."<sup>120</sup> The omission of Jesus' name is probably accidental,<sup>121</sup> and it is because the Apostle focused more on the theme of judgment than on the details. It is clear though that He is the one to whom the Apostle is referring.<sup>122</sup> While setting Jesus as an authority in the new worldview that he explains to them, Paul brings further arguments to testify to His divine election. God attests to all people of Jesus' position by resurrecting him.<sup>123</sup> This idea is at the least strange to the Athenians even though his train

---

<sup>115</sup> Schnabel, *"Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world,"* 182.

<sup>116</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 612.

<sup>117</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 340-341.

<sup>118</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 853.

<sup>119</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 570.

<sup>120</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 341.

<sup>121</sup> Accidental in the sense that his focus was not saying the name of Jesus as much as presenting His role in history; trying to convey the concept of the Messiah seems to have taken precedence over the naming of the Messiah. This is not to say that Paul was avoiding the mentioning of Jesus' name, rather he was more focused on presenting who Jesus is. For further research reference Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 852-853.

<sup>122</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 852-853.

<sup>123</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 570.

of thought makes sense. God confirmed Him through His resurrection and appointed Him as a judge of all humanity.<sup>124</sup> The implications of this statement are intelligible to his audience but are hard to accept considering their heathen worldview. There are writings that expound upon the Greek paradigm of death: for them “death meant that the soul became a shade going to hades, with no possibility of coming back to life.”<sup>125</sup> Some of their own writers as seen in the tragedy of Aeschylus assert the fact that “when the dust has soaked up the blood of a man, once he had died, there is no resurrection.”<sup>126</sup> The Stoics have a variety of views on the afterlife<sup>127</sup> and might have struggled with accepting the Apostle’s argument, while the Epicureans are in clear opposition.<sup>128</sup> They believe that the soul which they considered material would cease to exist at death. All Greeks nonetheless share the view that after death the body does not resurrect in any form.<sup>129</sup> At this point in the speech, Paul is opposition with all his listeners. Even though the indictment of popular pagan religion manifests through idolatry is mostly emphasized, the critique against the two major philosophical schools is also stringent. God is said to

---

<sup>124</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 377.

<sup>125</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 558.

<sup>126</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 612.

<sup>127</sup> Croy notes that Stoic views on the after-life were complex. However if Christians living in the late first century had any knowledge of that philosophical group, they would have recognized a way of thinking about the transcendence of human nature that at least approached their own. A sophisticated reader of Acts might very well have inferred the correspondence. In consequence, they might have been curios to hear more on what Paul had to say. For further research see Croy, *Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)*, 39.

<sup>128</sup> Croy explains on Epicureans is that they ruled out the afterlife entirely. For them there was no survival of death, limited or unlimited, conscious or unconscious, individual or universal, of body or of soul. For further research see Croy, *Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)*, 37.

<sup>129</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 571.

be near and to be involved in the affairs of humanity to the dismay of the Epicureans. On the other hand, He is described as distinguishable from creation and is to be known through revelation, not the study of nature, to the consternation of the Stoics. In addition to these arguments, Paul brings forth the resurrection, future judgment and eschatology of human history.<sup>130</sup> These ideas are altogether new and confusing as they do not match with their worldview. Paul adds tension by challenging them to make a decision about their beliefs in light of his exposition.

*The response (v. 32-34).* In view of the Apostle's challenge, they respond by mocking him and by following the beliefs of their own culture<sup>131</sup> while others are more polite but skeptical suggesting the opportunity of another exposition.<sup>132</sup> The fact that they postpone<sup>133</sup> a more detailed explanation indicates the fact that he may have had more to say; nonetheless he said enough to convince at least one Areopagite.<sup>134</sup> It has been

---

<sup>130</sup> Witherington, *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 535.

<sup>131</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 570.

<sup>132</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 343.

<sup>133</sup> Haenchen claims the responses is not one of rejection vs. genuine interest, but of *open* rejection vs. polite dismissal. There would not be a fundamental difference in the intent, but only in the harshness or civility of their expression. Croy on the other hand claims that the contrast between the two responses should be understood as open rejection versus sincere, if still somewhat hesitating, interest. He asserts that the contrast of vs. 32 should therefore be understood as open rejection versus sincere, if still somewhat hesitating, interest. The latter group is not pleading, "What must I do to be saved?" But neither are they summarily rejecting the message. There is openness; a final judgment has not been made. The reactions to the sermon are, in effect, reactions to the idea of the resurrection and the Stoics, as he explains in his article were much more open to the idea of life after death than the Epicureans were. For further research reference Clayton N., Croy. "Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)." (*Novum testamentum* 39, no. 1 (January 1997). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 27. Even though Croy brings forth some good arguments from Greek syntax and lukan context, his position is too enthusiastic. A moderate understanding of Haenchen view would be a better rendering of the text considering the fact that the conversion were not necessarily the response of those willing to listen another time, and that there is no detailed follow-up of this party noted by Luke. A positive response is possible in this context, but there are no solid arguments to claim such an enthusiastic position.

<sup>134</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 377.

suggested that since the homily is a summary, Paul would have preached<sup>135</sup> more on Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>136</sup> As the audience is in an uproar, Paul withdraws from the Areopagus. Luke ends this narrative by mentioning briefly his success,<sup>137</sup> at least two positive responses to his sermon being mentioned: (1) Dionysius the Areopagite and (2) Damaris.<sup>138</sup> There are other converts since “a few men became followers of Paul and believed.” Dionysius, however, is the most important one mentioned, being mentioned in later sources as the first bishop of Athens. The fact that he is an Areopagite points toward the fact that he is a man of influence, and that the Areopagus, where Paul preached, is made up of a body of men rather than a place.<sup>139</sup> It can be said that the “speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans; [the essential content] is biblical, but the presentation is Hellenistic.”<sup>140</sup> The work is “a standard of excellence in depth and relevance”<sup>141</sup> testifying to the Apostle’s ability and sensitivity in his kerygma.

## Conclusion

---

<sup>135</sup> the text however does not mention this hypothesis and the claim cannot be supported even though it is insightful. For further reference see Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 853-854.

<sup>136</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 853-854.

<sup>137</sup> Schnabel, “*Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world*,” 185.

<sup>138</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 571.

<sup>139</sup> Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, 855.

<sup>140</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 341.

<sup>141</sup> Gangel, “*Paul’s Areopagus speech*,” 312.

*Paul's consistency in his kerygma exemplified in the contextualization of the Areopagus speech.*

The Areopagus speech was studied in greater detail as to analyze how Paul's presentation of the gospel is influenced by a pagan audience of Greco-Roman philosophy. He changes the outlook of his kerygma (compared to other instances of it throughout Acts) yet as an Apostle he is bound to testify to certain non-negotiable doctrines. In many ways, the variation in his gospel presentation "can be explained from the difference of audience and the horizons of their understanding."<sup>142</sup> The speech does not prepare the future by enriching the monotheistic kerygma with pantheistical formulae that point theology towards mysticism. Paul uses a vocabulary that his listeners are familiar but which gives a new meaning to old words. He is relevant yet different so that the new message would be intelligibly communicated.<sup>143</sup> He "did not tone down the antithesis between Christianity and paganism."<sup>144</sup> On the contrary, he directly engages the Greco-Roman culture, with the attitude that although his arguments challenged the way people live, his message emphasizes the gospel as an invitation into a new life. He seeks points of contact with the search for truth that already is in the culture. The Apostle knows well, both his own message and the mentality of the people he evangelizes (he must be admired for how his aptitude to speak to people in the synagogue, to those in the

---

<sup>142</sup> Hemer, *"The speeches of Acts : pt 1: The Ephesian elders at Miletus; pt 2: The Areopagus address,"* 254.

<sup>143</sup> Schnabel, *"Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world,"* 184.

<sup>144</sup> Otto Alfred, Piper. "Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Testament Studies." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 2 (June 1959): 170-171. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*, 170.

city square, and to the highly sophisticated). This ability to adapt makes him very effective in his kerygma.<sup>145</sup> From the arguments brought forth in the thesis, it can be asserted that even though Paul accommodates his terminology to suit the Greek mind he certainly does not compromise the message of the gospel as he presents his speech.<sup>146</sup>

#### *Consequences on Today's Kerygma*

*Paul's model of contextualizing the kerygma.* Paul emphasizes different convictions depending on the audiences that he is addressing<sup>147</sup> and thus his message is an example of effective evangelism among people without a biblical heritage. Finding ways of evangelizing such peoples has always been important to Christians in non-Christian lands,<sup>148</sup> and the Apostle is a role model for such a mission. What can be said to be unique in the Areopagus speech is its appeal to Greek philosophical thought. Paul attempts to build bridges with the intellectuals and the masses in Athens in the hope of reaching them in a relevant way. As such, his speech becomes a model for the Christian apologists, who later attempt to present the faith to the pagan intellectuals of a later day. It should be noted that Paul never compromises the basic Christian principles of God as Creator, Judge and Christ's resurrection. There could be no accommodation made on these concepts even though these are difficult notions for the Athenians to grasp. Bridge building is essential in the presentation of the gospel, particularly when addressing

---

<sup>145</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 573.

<sup>146</sup> Gangel, "Paul's Areopagus speech," 310.

<sup>147</sup> Schnabel, "Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world," 177.

<sup>148</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 478.

different cultures. Paul's Areopagus address provides both a precedent and a pattern for this essential task.<sup>149</sup>

*Contextualizing the kerygma today.* The Apostle finds common ground with the hearer's sense of religion and their beliefs and then works his way to the kerygma. Today's Christianity needs to do the same.<sup>150</sup> The culture must be understood before the people are engaged with the gospel. A conceptual bridge must be built so that those who do not know God can be intelligibly engaged. Incorporating fragments of a particular culture<sup>151</sup> is permissible and necessary for a relevant kerygma. In many ways, the gospel could not be intelligibly presented without these elements. The main goal that has to be kept in view is that the people need to come to know God in a personal way. Culture is the expression of what people believe in, and the proclamation of Jesus needs to start in such an encounter with people's beliefs. If *engaging*<sup>152</sup> *the culture* and using it to present the gospel is what needs to be done, as this thesis has asserted, then Christians should not shy away, nor should they get overly captivated by the task of contextualization. Instead,

---

<sup>149</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 377-378.

<sup>150</sup> Rogness, "*Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill*," 277.

<sup>151</sup> Note that "we must also avoid the pitfall of syncretism. What is most important is the faithfully to proclaim the gospel. If we can find points of contact with our audience along the way, we should use them, but the gospel is always primary." Fernando, *Acts*, 480.

<sup>152</sup> Fernando makes a pertinent comment in asserting that "the equivalent of the agora will vary in different parts of the world. It may be a park, city square or street corner, a shopping mall or market place, a 'pub', neighborhood bar, café, discotheque or student cafeteria, where people meet when they are at leisure. And we must reach the intelligentsia. [...] There is an urgent need for more Christian thinkers to who will dedicate their minds to Christ, not only as lecturers, but also as authors, journalists, dramatists and broadcasters, as television script-writers, producers and personalities, and as artists and actors who use a variety of art forms in which to communicate the gospel. Paul [...] devoted his mind to the cause of the gospel – to penetrating the unreached with the message of Christ. This is not the only type of person God uses, but such people are needed to develop strategies to reach unreached groups of people. [...] Particularly lacking is the penetration of the highest (and lowest) strata of society. The Church should be challenging people to engage the intellectual of our day." For further research reference Fernando, *Acts*, 482-483.

with wisdom, boldness and sensitivity they should use culture to present the good news of Jesus Christ intelligibly, relating to the people who need to hear it in their own context.

WORK CITED

- Achtemeier, Paul J. "Kerygma." *The HarperCollins Dictionary*, 564. San Francisco, CA : HarperSanFrancisco. Revised and updated edition, 1996.
- Arnold, Clinton. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 392. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. Barrett, C.K. *Acts 15-28*. New York: T&T Clark LTD, 2004.
- Barackman, Paul F. "Interpretation and communication: preaching from Acts." *Interpretation* 13, no. 2 (April 1959): 177-194. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Barrett, C.K.. *Acts 15-28*. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. New York: T&T Clark LTD, 2004.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Book Of The Acts*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.
- Croy, N Clayton. "Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)." *Novum testamentum* 39, no. 1 (January 1997): 21-39. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 2, 2008).
- Dunham, Robert E. "Acts 17:16-34." *Interpretation* 60, no. 2 (April 2006): 202-204. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Elwell, Walter A. "Kerygma." *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 444. Baker reference library, 1996.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.
- Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Fleming, Dean. "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication." *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (April 2002): 199-214. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Freedman, John A. "Kerygma." *Eerdmans Dictionary Of The Bible*, 764. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.
- Fitzmeyer, Joseph A.. *The Acts Of The Apostles*. Anchor Bible Commentary Series. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

- Fudge, Edward. "Paul's apostolic self-consciousness at Athens." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14, no. 3 (Sum 1971): 193-198. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 4, 2008).
- Gangel, Kenneth O. "Paul's Areopagus speech." *Bibliotheca sacra* 127, no. 508 (October 1970): 308-312. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Gray, Patrick. "Implied audiences in the Areopagus narrative." *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 2 (2004): 205-218. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Athenian curiosity (Acts 17:21)." *Novum testamentum* 47, no. 2 (2005): 109-116. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Hemer, Colin J. "The speeches of Acts : pt 1: The Ephesian elders at Miletus; pt 2: The Areopagus address." *Tyndale Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (1989): 239-259. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Hoerber, Robert G. "Paul at Athens." *Concordia Journal* 21, no. 2 (April 1995): 202-205. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 2, 2008).
- Johnson, Timothy Luke. *The Acts Of The Apostles*. Sacra Pagina Series. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- Marshall, Howard. *The Book Of Acts*. The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans, 1980.
- McNulty, T Michael. "Pauline preaching : a speech-act analysis." *Worship* 53, no. 3 (May 1979): 207-214. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Oden, Thomas. *Acts*. Ancient Christian commentary on Scripture. New Testament. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006.
- Parente, Pascal P. "St Paul's address before the Areopagus." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (April 1949): 144-150. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Piper, Otto Alfred. "Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Testament Studies." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 2 (June 1959): 170-171. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Polhill, John B. *Acts*. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992.

- Rogness, Michael. "Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill." *Word & World* 27, no. 3 (Sum 2007): 274-294. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Sandnes, Karl Olav. "Paul and Socrates : The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (June 1993): 13-26. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. "Contextualising Paul in Athens: the proclamation of the gospel before pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world." *Religion & Theology/Religie & teologie* 12, no. 2 (2005): 172-190. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Winter, Bruce W. "On Introducing Gods to Athens : An Alternative Reading of Acts 17:18-20." *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 1 (1996): 71-90. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 1, 2008).
- Witherington, Ben III. *The Acts Of The Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Appendix 1

Examples of the kerygma throughout Acts

If a formula that could be distilled concerning the Apostle's method of preaching it would be something on the lines of: Paul preached to the crowd the Gospel and challenged them to repent; as they would repent from their evil ways and turn toward God they were forgiven of their sins, and then the apostle would challenge the believers to live out this new relationship with God in the Church that would form.

Luke is not giving us an exact narration of the events, rather the important moments in the development of Christianity directed by the guidance of the apostles. It is thus understood that the speeches recorded in Acts are not the 'word for word' sermons that Paul gave rather they are "a summary in Luke's language of the kind of thing that Paul said to the gentile audience."<sup>153</sup>

Paul's speech at Pisidia-Antioch as described in Acts 13:16-41 is the apostle's first recorded 'sermon'. Since his audience is Jewish, he starts with a history of Israel. Paul is on familiar ground because the people he is talking to know the Old Testament. The sermon is a historical survey describing how Abraham, Moses, the judges, Samuel, Saul, David, the prophets, right up to John the Baptist led to the coming of the Messiah.<sup>154</sup> The speech follows with the introduction of Jesus who was confirmed by John but rejected and crucified by the Jews; "after laying the foundation from the Old

---

<sup>153</sup> Marshall. *The Book Of Acts*, 289.

<sup>154</sup> Rogness, "Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill," 275.

Testament, Paul talked extensively about Jesus”.<sup>155</sup> The point of his sermon was the deity of Jesus, foretold by the prophets, confirmed through his resurrection and the forgiveness of sin as a consequence. The apostle closed his kerygma with a challenge to repent by quoting the prophet Habakkuk. Some of them responded positively to this presentation of the Gospel but as the other Jews rejected the apostle and his missionary crew preached to the Gentiles. As the narrative goes on, it is recorded that there were disciples left in that city, and most likely, as in the other cities their community formed the local Church.

The next speech that Luke depicts is at Lystra and Derbe as recorded in Acts 14:15-18. This is the apostle’s first speech to the pagans.<sup>156</sup> As Paul tells the “good news” he explains it means to “turn from these worthless things [referring to idols] to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them (v.15)”. In this small yet comprehensive description it can be seen how Paul appeals to natural theology as being the first ground of argumentation for the existence and the nature of God. Starting from the world that they could see, he points out the Creator God that demands worship as the Supreme Being that he is. He called them to repentance from worshiping idols to the true God. The apostles goes to describe how even though God may have not been evident to them, He “has not left himself without testimony (v.17)”, by giving them sustenance for life and not only that but being so good as to fill their hearts with joy (v.18). The apostle approaches this theme of God’s care for them as a preamble toward the gospel as he is restraining them from offering sacrifices to them.<sup>157</sup> In this short

---

<sup>155</sup> Rogness, *Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill*, 285.

<sup>156</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 529.

<sup>157</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 473.

address Paul does not introduce any Christological kerygma, but seeks to instill the basis for a faith in God.<sup>158</sup> The message is interrupted by some unbelieving Jews who came from the other cities where the apostle preached and they continued to persecute him. The conclusion of Paul's message is not reached. His was calling people to repent on the basis of God's authority and this is the first part of the kerygma previously defined. It cannot be asserted with certitude that he would have ended at a proclamation of Christ, but with conviction he communicated intelligibly the begging of that message, namely that there is but one God and that everybody needs to worship Him alone.

The next passage that contains useful information in regards to Paul's kerygma is found in Acts 11-38. In this scene Paul is making converts in the Roman colony of Philippi. There is no explicit kerygma to begin with. The apostle found a group of women who were gathered in what seemed to be a place of prayer and started talking to them. It is interesting to notice that one of them named Lydia was a worshiper of God. She was a pious woman, and could have formerly been a polytheist who became a worshiper of the God of Israel.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, she needed to do more, and as Paul spoke she believed and acknowledged Jesus as Lord. The following passage implies that she was a convert to Christianity because she believed and then she got baptized. She also gave practical proof of her faith by pressing the missionaries to be her guests.<sup>160</sup> As Paul encountered a woman possessed by spirit of divination he was troubled by her aggressive announcing of

---

<sup>158</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 529.

<sup>159</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 534.

<sup>160</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 311.

his proclamation.<sup>161</sup> The pagan girl who was practicing the Greco-Roman practice of soothsaying is made to proclaim that salvation come from the Most High God of Christianity. The Apostle exorcises slave girl with the pythonian spirit by using the refrain of “the name of Jesus.”<sup>162</sup> As a consequence she lost her divination capacity and her masters throw Paul and Silas in jail. There, they were praying and singing hymns to God when an earthquake opened all the shackles and the doors. Seeing this, the jailor was about to commit suicide when Paul stopped him. Not only were both of them there, but apparently they restrained the other to escape to leave. Such an expected behavior coupled with the earthquake which might have been perceived as a divine vindication led he jailor to ask what the way of salvation was.<sup>163</sup> The answer that Paul gives is classic and it briefly formulate the “way of salvation” namely it calls for faith in the Lord Jesus a succinct reformulation of the basic Christian kerygma.<sup>164</sup>

This passage depicts Paul’s kerygma as successful in its interaction with the leading competing religious elements of his time: (1) God fearers – the synagogue, (2) Roman religious beliefs and (3) paganism and the spirit world.<sup>165</sup>

The conclusion that can be asserted concerning Paul’s kerygma is that a red thread can be found all throughout the narratives. The message may not be the same word for word, nor the main ideas repeated in a similar fashion, but that was not the point of

---

<sup>161</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 535.

<sup>162</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 583.

<sup>163</sup> Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts*, 317.

<sup>164</sup> Fitzmeyer, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, 589.

<sup>165</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 535.

the apostle's preaching. For Paul the kerygma was not primarily about convincing adherents of a new teaching, rather it was, "understanding [that] the gospel proclamation means becoming a different kind of person."<sup>166</sup> He sought to find devout believers who would become Christian converts, not admirers of the Gospel. In some instances as in Pisidia–Antioch or Philippi he goes so far as to proclaim Jesus as Christ and call people to faith in him, in other places and Lystra-Derbe he gets only part-way into his kerygma and manages only to set the arguments for his presentation, namely that there is only one true God and he demands worship from all the human beings he takes care of.

The pattern that can be observed in his method of approaching a city with the gospel is his encounter with the Jews in that location. As "Paul continues on as he travels, [he is] preaching in synagogues to people who knew their Hebrew Bible."<sup>167</sup> They believed and worshiped the one true God and Paul had a common ground of beliefs upon which he could build his proclamation of Jesus as Messiah. That was the mission he was commissioned to in Acts 9 and that it the mission he is faithful to until the end, as it can be observed towards the end of his life in Acts 26. In this final presentation Paul advocates as in his other speeches the declaration of the cross and the insistence that this new faith is actually an extension of Judaism.<sup>168</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Michael T., McNulty. "Pauline preaching : a speech-act analysis." (*Worship* 53, no. 3 (May 1979). *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*), 214.

<sup>167</sup> Rogness, "*Proclaiming the gospel on Mars Hill*," 275.

<sup>168</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 705.

## Appendix 2

## Paul's use of the OT

The table below contains a list of verses that Paul alluded to in his speech<sup>169</sup> :

Paul's Dependence on the Old Testament in the Areopagus Address	
Statement	Old Testament Reference
God made the world and everything in it (v.24)	Gen. 1-2; Isa.42:5; Jer. 10:12, 16
God does not live in temple built by hands (v.24)	1 Kings 8:27;
Lord of heaven and earth (v.24)	Ex. 20:11; Isa. 42:5
God does not need anything from the people he has created (v.25)	1 Chron. 29:14; Ps. 50:7-15
God as the source of "breath" (v.25)	Gen. 2:7; Isa. 42:5
God appointed the eras for the successive nations (v.26)	Deut. 32:8; Dan. 2:36-45
God established national boundaries (v.26)	Deut. 32:8; Ps. 74:17
God desires that people would seek him	Ps. 14:2; Prov. 8:17; Isa. 55:6; 65:1;

<sup>169</sup> Clinton, Arnold. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. Barrett, C.K.. *Acts 15-28*. New York: T&T Clark LTD, 2004), 392.

(v.27)	Jer. 29:3
God is not far away (v.27)	Ps. 145:18; Jer. 23:23-24
God is not like an image made out of gold, silver or stone (v.29)	Deut. 5:8; Ps. 115:2-8; Isa. 37:19; 44:9-20
God has overlooked such ignorance (v.30)	(see Rom 3:25)
God calls men now to repent (v.30)	Isa. 59:20 Jer. 15:19; Ezek. 14:6; 18:30, 32;
God will judge the world (v. 31)	Ps. 9:8; 96:13; 98:9; Isa. 66:16; Jer. 25:31
God has appointed a man who will judge (v. 31)	(see John 5:22, 27, 30)

## Appendix 3

## Development of the Greek concept of God

The philosophical schools that were in Athens had the prestigious legacy of developing on the invaluable work of some of philosophy's most brilliant men: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The world's first philosopher (in the classic) sense is considered Socrates (469-399 B.C.), and for good reason; "the pre-Socratic philosophers were primarily natural philosophers. Socrates decided the main problem was the human person and turned his attention to practical affairs of daily living. He was responsible for philosophy becoming concerned with the conscience and personal religion."<sup>170</sup> His manner of investigating philosophical matters was through questions. He did not seek to explain certain aspects of life as much as he tried to understand them while conversing with his subjects, and making them aware of greater truths. He gained popularity among the crowds for his humble and wise approach to life, but in the same manner he caused uproar in the city because of his new ideas. He was sentenced to death, and in reaction to his martyrdom, one of his disciples – Plato (429-347 B.C.) – rose to take his place. He continued the work of his beloved mentor, and took it to a new level. He developed a theory of 'ideas': "For Plato [...] ideas are neither physical nor mental; they are outside space and time. Ideas are real; the physical world is but a poor imitation. [...] To actualize something is to degrade it."<sup>171</sup> In regards to divinity, one can observe the fact that "Plato does not have a personal God. His thought is deeply religious, but it is the

---

<sup>170</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*, 307.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

impersonal principle of perfection that he worships.”<sup>172</sup> He had the idea of a God above everything else, but it was dichotomous: God would be the one to whom every being related to but he was not the embodiment of perfection. The embodiment of perfection was the idea of good, which was just an idea. God was the explanation of that idea to humans.

He is also known for founding the Academy where he taught his ideas and where bright students would come and learn the latest in matters of philosophy. One of his students was a young man by the name of Aristotle (384-322 B.C). In the course of time he developed the ideas of his teacher, and started new areas of research. Of particular interest to us is his view on God:

“The eternal mind, always contemplating his own thinking, was the logical culmination of the hierarchy of substances and the ultimate explanation for motion and change – but it was not a person exercising providence or revealing his will[...] Aristotle’s thought was centered in the universe; and his ‘God’ was a part of the structure of reality, at its pinnacle to be sure, but not outside of it or its cause.”<sup>173</sup>

From a holistic view on Greek society, religion and consequently the concept of deity changed gradually but significantly over the centuries. While the Jews maintained a monotheistic view of God, the concept of divinity changed so much in the Greek context that at the time the Apostle, their view of God was a mixture of polytheism, pantheism and atheism depending on which school of philosophy one followed.

---

<sup>172</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*, 313.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.