

## “A Good Debate”

**Psalm 11; Acts 17:22-34**

August 25, 2024

### Introduction

- Before I was a chef, I was invited to a thing called, “The Taste of Charlotte.”
- It was an event for restaurants to showcase their best dishes to a host of people.
- It was a lot of fun, held at a swanky hotel in the early days of the event.
- I went and was having a good time.
- Then, we got to a place that was serving chili.
  - o I like chili so I figure this is the way to go, right?
  - o Well, they were putting sour cream on it.
    - Not something I did or had ever heard of at the time, really.
  - o But that’s when a taste revelation came.
    - That which I didn’t know was exactly what I needed.

### Transition to Text

- That’s exactly what’s going on here in Acts.
- Paul is in Athens.
  - o Athens at the time is still a cultural center.
    - Not the seat of power any longer, that was Rome, Athens still was a cultural force and a place where philosophy reigned.
      - But philosophy was kind of stuck at the time.
        - o The quest for truth had floundered.
          - Both Plato and Aristotle come close but don’t quite get their and their systems don’t align at all.
    - o Philosophy was stuck in skepticism.
      - There was no truth.
- Athens was a great center of idolatry.
  - o Paul laments this early in the passage.
  - o What is an idol?
    - In Christian theology, an idol is anything—whether a physical object, person, idea, or pursuit—that takes the place of God in a person’s life.
    - It is something that is worshiped, trusted, or prioritized above God, effectively becoming a substitute for God.
    - *“Idolatry occurs when devotion, reverence, or ultimate allegiance is directed toward something other than God, violating the first commandment to have no other gods before Him.”* (Exodus 20:3).
      - Exodus 20:3 – “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
    - Idols can be tangible, like statues, or intangible, like power, wealth, or personal desires, and they detract from the worship and glory that belong to God alone.
      - And we tend to become idolaters. John Cavlin once said, “a factory of idols:
- Paul laments Athens as a seat of idolatry.
  - o Idolatry shows us that we’re sinners.
    - That we choose to worship something other than God shows that we are out of whack.
      - Paul really nails this in Romans chapter 1.
- But Paul wants the Athenians to know God so his sermon looks at God in His entirety, introducing him to the Athenians there at Mars Hill.

### God as Creator

- **Key Idea:** God is not one of many gods but the singular Creator of everything. Unlike the idols made by human hands, God made humanity and the entire cosmos.
- Paul declares the God that they don’t know is the creator of the world.

- There aren't many gods, a multiplicity of gods, there is ONE GOD known through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - Creation as work of art.
    - The artist isn't fully known and isn't entirely their work of art.
    - *Imagine walking into an art gallery and standing before a magnificent sculpture. The intricacies of the piece are breathtaking—every detail, from the smallest groove to the grandest structure, speaks of immense skill and creativity. As you admire the work, someone tells you that this sculpture wasn't crafted by any human hand, but it somehow came into existence on its own. You would naturally find this idea absurd. Such beauty and precision clearly point to an intentional creator—someone who had a vision and brought it to life through their skillful hands.*
    - *Now, take that thought and magnify it to the scale of the universe. The stars, the oceans, the mountains, and even the complexities of human life—all these reflect the work of the ultimate Creator. Just as a sculpture cannot exist without a sculptor, the cosmos cannot exist without God, the Creator.*
    - Creation must have a powerful creator.
      - This idea would've come strong against the Epicureans.

But Paul's sermon reveals more about this unknown God to the Athenians.

He then introduces the idea of God as Sustainer.

God as Sustainer.

- **Key Idea:** God is not a distant, detached deity but is actively involved in the sustenance of life.
- *He is not dependent on anything we offer but is the source of all we need.*
- *Imagine the human heart. From the moment we are born until the moment we die, our hearts beat continuously, often without us even noticing. It pumps blood throughout our bodies, delivering oxygen and nutrients that sustain life. We don't have to consciously tell our hearts to beat—it just happens. It's one of the most basic yet essential functions of our bodies, and we often take it for granted.*
  - *Now, consider this: What if God is like the heartbeat of the universe? Just as the heart sustains life in our bodies without our conscious effort, God sustains all of creation without our even realizing it. Every breath we take, every sunrise, every turn of the seasons—these are all sustained by God's power, just as our lives are sustained by the steady beat of our hearts.*
    - *Just as we can't make our hearts beat on our own, we can't sustain ourselves or the world around us. It is God who keeps everything in motion, from the smallest cell in our bodies to the vast galaxies in the universe. And just as the heart is faithful in its work, so is God faithful in sustaining us, moment by moment, day by day.*

God as Redeemer

- **Key Idea:** God not only creates and sustains but also redeems. His ultimate purpose is not just to uphold creation but to bring people into a saving relationship through Christ.
- **Key Scripture: Colossians 1:13-14** – *"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*
- **The Gospel**
  - We were created, but we strayed. Through the Gospel, God calls us back into full fellowship with Himself through His Son in the Power of His Holy Spirit.
- *Imagine a beautiful, handcrafted vase—an heirloom passed down through generations, admired for its elegance and craftsmanship. One day, a tragic accident occurs, and the*

*vase shatters into dozens of pieces. Most people would see it as beyond repair, too broken to ever be restored to its former glory. They might even think of discarding it entirely.*

- *But then, in comes the master craftsman who originally made the vase. He sees the shattered pieces and doesn't view them as worthless. Instead, with immense care and patience, he begins the painstaking process of restoring the vase. Piece by piece, he puts it back together, not simply making it what it once was, but transforming it into something even more beautiful. The cracks and flaws become part of the design, a testament to its journey from brokenness to restoration.*
- *This is what God, the Redeemer, does for us. When sin shatters our lives, God doesn't discard us as broken and useless. Instead, He steps in with His redeeming grace, carefully putting the pieces of our lives back together. Through the redemption offered in Christ, God doesn't just restore us to what we were—He transforms us into something even more beautiful, making our lives a testimony to His redemptive power.*