

XI. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective  
*Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders*

“Why Creation is Crucial”

Acts 17:16-34

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This is our third of four studies in this defense of the faith by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17 where he engaged those in Athens. In this study we are particularly focused on the creation. Is contending and defending for the Biblical doctrine of creation crucial? Is it important? Is it a priority? Let's find out from the Apostle Paul. In the next study we'll look at the historical Adam and Eve in which Paul also thinks important. Is Adam and Eve historical or mythical? In this study I'll start by reading the first part of this text in Acts 17 and then come back to it.

Acts 17:16-23 says [16] *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbling wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.*

[22] *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”* The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

There are four questions that absolutely drive every educational enterprise and absolutely consume almost all of us. They are four questions that we need and want answered and in fact the need to have them answered almost answers them. Here are the four questions. Question one is who am I? Question two is where did I come from? Question three is why am I here? Question four is where am I going? Question one ‘who am I,’ reveals my identity. Question two ‘where did I come from’ reveals my origin. Question three ‘why am I here’ reveals my purpose. Is my existence important or purpose or am I a cosmic accident with no purpose. Question four ‘where am I going’ reveals my future.

Those are the four crucial questions that basically have two answers to them. The answers have a myriad of formulations around them but one answer is the answer of the materialist. The materialist answer says you're a piece of everything that is around you. There is what is and it's all that there is and that's all that there ever will be. You happen to be a part of it. Today, for the materialist answer many of us spend thousands and thousands of dollars not only for ourselves but for our children to be so educated with a

world and life view that answers question one about identity for them to just figure it out. So some have their identity in their sexual behavior or their nation or their job or their title and they are all searching for these identities. Whatever you decide to be is who you are.

Question two of where you came from is answered by the world that you're a cosmic accident. Basically there was space, time and matter and you give it long enough and here you are. Somehow it ordered itself so that you have an ordered existence and that you arrived as a conjugated mass of accidental collisions of cellular activity so now you're here.

Question three of why am I here is answered as *carpe diem* where there is no past, no future so cease the day. You determine why you're here. Make it whatever you want it to be. There is no ethical right or wrong. Now there are some cultural morays that kind of hang around but it's actually whatever it is you want to be. Cease the day and we flock to such things because they are so wonderfully displayed in various songs. The most popular funeral song in America today is Frank Sinatra's song 'I Did It My Way.' What poppycock!

The fourth question of where am I headed is answered that you're going to be worm food one day and that's pretty much it. It's done. So the nihilism of despair and death is the future. So the materialist has these basic answers to these four questions.

What's the other answer? It is the theist answer, most rightly portrayed through the Biblical doctrine of creation. Who am I? You are a sacred-ship. You are a chip off the sacred block. You are made in the image of God. That is your identity. Secondly, how did I get here? You got here by the design and spoken Word of God. He brought you into existence. He made you in His image. Why am I here? You are here for His glory which is unspeakable joy and that's why He created you. Where am I going? There are two destinations. One is for those who have received the love of God in Christ and that you will be with Him forever. His will is done in Christ for you. Those who said 'no' to the love of God but I prefer the wrath of God then your will, will be done under the judgment of God, unendurable yet forever.

The four questions really answer whether one is a materialist that just takes their place in the animal world or a theist. How many wildebeests, sharks, mammals or one-celled animals are out there asking 'who am I, where did I come from, why am I here and where am I going'? The very fact that you're asking those questions already answers your question. You are here bearing the Diving stamp of the One true and living God but once you ask those four questions there is another question that it absolutely crucial that and that gives a fifth question which is 'how can I be right with God.' Not only are those four questions the evidence that the answer is that you have been made by God Himself for His glory and your joy with purpose and for eternity (for God has put eternity in the heart of a man) but the reason those questions are not answered with a God-centered answer is because we don't really want to ask the fifth question for we would prefer to be God than to be right with God. So we will take a sophisticated journey into imbecility to deny the Creator in order for us to be God. That will be the journey of a life denying and suppressing all evidence of the Creator so that I do not have to surrender to Him as Redeemer and Lord.

It is that, that Paul addresses here. Is this matter of the Biblical doctrine of creation, a God-centered view of creation, something to contend for and defend? It is

clearly under assault. There was a time where the culture shaping institutions of our society at least affirmed the reality of the creation and therefore there is a Creator. Today, many of the halls of the academy, the spheres of industry and the schools that couldn't even touch the reputation of Mars Hill, if it leaks out that men and women are created in the image of God and what surrounds us is here by the act of God in creation then you might not be able to get a job. You certainly can't get tenure in the job and it doesn't matter what your credentials are or how brilliant you are or what the product is of your life. The reason the whole God-centered view is not allowed is that those who don't allow it can't stand the debate, therefore they want to rule it out of the forum because the evidence always leads back to God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

So should we contend for it or not? We need to ask the Apostle Paul that but before I get to that I'd like to review a little. We are doing this series of contending and defending the faith because there are two strategies of Satan. Strategy number one is to intimidate the Christian and the church. Intimidation is done in many ways from state to cultural to emotional to academic to economic persecution. Then there is also infiltration where Satan infiltrates the leadership and fellowship of the church with false teaching and false teachers. In this matter of creation Satan is doing both of those. He intimidates the church by people not keeping their job or place in society if you hold to a position of creation and infiltration happens through various websites that say we are a series of mutation and gives the view of macroevolution. Yet the fossil record doesn't give any evidence of this but who cares about facts for you just jump from species to species and we finally arrived at you in terms of humanity.

Why would Satan want to attack creation by intimidation and infiltration? When Satan gives those two strategies the Apostles give us the response. The response to infiltration is to contend for the faith and the key text for that Jude 1:3-4 and we looked at a case study in the life of the Apostle Paul. Then when the world attempts to silence us into silence or paralysis then we're to defend the faith by always being ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you. The key text for that is in I Peter 3:13-17. In this case we've also found a case study on how to defend the faith in the life of the Apostle Paul. There are eight times in the book of Acts where Paul is defending the faith. I have chosen the one in Acts 17 because of the richness of it and it occurs in the context of what I Peter 3 says. Paul is out declaring his hope in the Gospel.

Here Paul is taking a little sightseeing tour in the capital of intellectualism of all the world at that time with all the religions and philosophies finding their root right here in Athens. As he sees all the idols that are there he is provoked by the idols and instead of trying to tear them down he gets an idol destroying Gospel. He goes to the synagogue to the Jews and begins to evangelize. He goes to the marketplace to the Gentiles and begins to evangelize them. As you are declaring the hope of the Gospel you will be dragged before the courts and forums of a secular society. So Paul is dragged up to Mars Hill to give an account of the reason for the hope that is within him that he has been preaching. How is Paul going to deal with these people?

He is looking at his audience. In the last study we learned that the audience never determines your message. The audience determines the starting point of your message. If I'm in the synagogue I don't need to start with God, creation and sin because they already know that so I start with Jesus. Now with the Gentiles who are scripturally illiterate society where do I start? Paul found a point to start with when he told there was

an idol they had erected to an 'unknown god.' This God whom you worship in ignorance I declare to you in truth so Paul starts at that point. The audience doesn't determine your message but they will determine your starting point, your vocabulary and your illustrations. The Word of God determines your message but how can you start with the Word of God when they don't have the Word of God or know it? Paul says he is going to start where their -isms have rubbed raw and they are just trying to cover their basis.

In doing this the Apostle Paul has shown us seven things that I'm just going to review quickly with you from the last study. The first thing he shows us from this text is that men and women are believers. Everyone you meet is a believer. The question isn't whether they are a believer but the question is in who or what. In my life of ungodly rebellion, immorality and blasphemy against God I did not have my trust in Jesus but I was believer but it was all about me. I didn't have enough faith to be an atheist. I did want to be an atheist but I just could not make that leap in the dark because the Biblical truth of creation, redemption and providence is not a leap in the dark but walking in the light for all the evidence leads there, unless you suppress it or distort it. The atheist is a believer. James tells us that Satan believes.

Secondly, that means everyone is religious. Whatever you believe will order your time, treasure and your talents. If you want to know what someone really believes just take a look at their calendar, their budget and how they order their life. We will order our lives around what we believe which means number three, we're all worshippers. Everyone is worshipping something or someone or both. It may be the worship of actors, athletes, celebrities, money, power or prestige but everyone is a worshipper. What you believe will lead to a way of life and religion and then that will lead to worship.

Fourthly, is we are all sinners and that means you'll always believe the wrong thing. Instead of true religion given by God you'll have a man-made religion to replace God and because of our sin we'll always worship wrongly as well and worship in the wrong direction because we're sinners.

Number five is that whatever it is we are believing or worshipping in our religious life is not working. It wasn't working for those in Athens and this was the capital of the world that invented all these things. Paul went to the place that stood to invent religions and gods and to sustain their gods and religions. It says that they kept looking for something new because it wasn't working. What they had wasn't working and so they created one to the 'unknown god' for they needed a gap-filler. It isn't working in life, death, the happy moments of life, or when you lay down at night and it doesn't work in a broken world as we live in a Genesis 3 world. It doesn't work and it won't work.

Number six is that we have the solution. It has been entrusted to us. The answer is the Gospel and that's why Paul is taking them from Mars Hill to Calvary Hill. Number seven, two things have to happen for that answer to be received. One, is that someone empowered by the Holy Spirit must bring the Gospel to men and women to destroy the arguments against God and to win those who need to come to Him. So there needs to be a Holy Spirit-empowered witness and the second thing needed is that the Holy Spirit must give eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to believe. That's why when Paul finished it said some believed, some mocked and some want to talk more.

So what does Paul do? He knows who his audience is and the seven things that mark them out. Then he begins his message and starts with the doctrine of God. After that he gives to them the doctrine of man where man is made in the image of God and

we're His offspring. He speaks of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. In Him you live, move and have your being. Then goes to man made in the image of God and then he talks about sin where we are helpless and hopeless without God. Then he brings the answer which is Christ and that this Jesus died an atoning death and is resurrected. Then he calls them to faith and repentance for forgiveness of sin and a newness of life. Then he warns them that there is a day fixed for judgment and you and I will be on time on that day. The question is, are we resting in the love of God or have we said 'no' to it and we face the wrath of God? That's his message.

Interestingly, he starts with God and more precisely he starts with God as Creator. He doesn't see that as something superfluous. You can't get how and why you got here wrong and still preach the Gospel. You can't give up on the doctrine of God as Creator as revealed in the Word of God for if you do, then you don't have a Gospel or a reason for a Gospel or a confidence in the Gospel. So he starts where he needs to start which is in God as Creator. Paul is very clear. This God made you and you are His offspring. This God sustains you. You're on this mountain talking about the gods you're sustaining and you're only on this mountain because God who is God is sustaining you. It is the God whom you worship in ignorance and He is not 'unknown.' He is unknown only because you're hiding, suppressing or distorting the truth. He has made Himself known all around you and within you. Then he declares to them with no uncertain terms that God is the Creator and they exist by Divine appointment and design for a Divine purpose where the whole creation shouts God to them.

Acts 17:24-34 says [24] *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."*

[29] *Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

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

Immediately Paul starts at the doctrine of God and goes directly to God as Creator and the creation. This God is not unknown. He has made Himself known in everything around you, by making you and by sustaining you. I want to show you another passage where Paul is doing the same thing of declaring the love of God by reminding us of the wrath of God, telling us that it is God who made us and that's why He is able to save us. The passage is in Romans 1.

Romans 1:16-25 says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

*[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

*[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

Here is the love of God and the Gospel but if you don't receive the Gospel you are under the wrath of God. The problem is not information to the mind but the problem is the heart that suppresses the information revealed all around us. To deny God and deny God as Creator is a sophisticated, brilliant journey into imbecility – professing to be wise they became fools. Deny God as Creator will always show up in the depth and decadence of sexual anarchy. They did this because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator. Instead of saying 'to Creator and creation' they say 'there is only one, just the creation and I should be worshipped in it for I am the object of my worship.' It is that that has to be confronted but to do that you have to suppress the evidence. All the evidence leads to God as Creator.

True science can say nothing about origins by definition. It can track evidence. When you track the evidence the evidence shouts loudly and proclaims there is a Creator. I want to illustrate this and I received permission to use this from my wife, Cindy. I married a wonderful Southern Baptist girl who loves Jesus and somehow loved me. That pretty much meant she had never seen a movie in her life. One day I went for a jog and when I got back I was going to take my dad to a movie so I asked my wife if she would check in the paper to see if there was anything worth going to see. I called her and asked her what she found and she said "Honey, there are 15 movies, most don't look that good but there are a couple that do. Did you know that every one of these movies have the same guy in it?" I said "Who is that?" She replied "Dolby Stereo." I fell over laughing and told her that wasn't an actor but that it was the sound system that they are using. She said "Oh that's why it says 'surround sound.'" So I brought her from Southern Baptist Christianity to Presbyterian Christianity. Why do I bring this out to you?

You live in the theater of God which Calvin said. There is nothing around you but surround sound. The heavens declare the glory of God. Night after night and day after day their speech pours forth. The glory and majesty of God is all around us. It shouts to us that God is glorious and it's not only around us but it's in us. At age 5 you

will not meet an atheist. They will have to learn to be an atheist. They are made in the image of God asking questions – who am I, why am I here, where did I come from and where am I going? How can I be right with God?

We work as hard as we can to say we're not the chip off the sacred block for we are cosmic mutated accident of a conjugation of cells that somehow come together. Do you know about all the bad science I have to do to believe that? I have to believe in the suspension of the second law of thermo dynamics which says everything left alone runs down and I have to believe that there was a time when everything was left alone and it ran up or I have to believe even though there is no scientific evidence whatsoever that if you leave everything alone in disorder somehow it orders itself. That's like going into a printing press, blowing it up and thinking you're going to get a dictionary. That's like cutting loose a mouse on a piano and thinking you're going to hear Handel's Messiah played. That's like my great, great grandfather's watch that I love with all its intricacies. I'll just take it apart, empty it in my pocket and shake it until I hear something tick. How long will I have to wait to hear that tick?

Why don't we have a multi-verse instead of a uni-verse? The evidence shouts design and that means evidence leads you to a Designer. It shouts beauty that leads you to the eternal attributes and majesty of God. Within you is the ability to appreciate beauty. Do you think that wildebeest is out there saying 'what a wonderful sunset'? All of that has been built into you by the Divine stamp. *Imago Dei* - You have been made in the image of God. There is no evidence whatsoever to spontaneous generation. You can't take a dead limb, stick in the ground and expect an oak tree to grow. Where did that life come from? How is it ordered? Why are the fossil records so abundantly clear that there is no species to species? Why do we make such inane statements like weather person who says 'did everybody enjoy last week for wasn't Mother Nature wonderful'? There we take the trip into pantheism. Why do we use words like 'father time' and 'mother nature'?

Those things provoke me, not to idol axes, but to an idol-destroying Gospel that men and women will be taken from the futility of Mars Hill to the glory of Calvary's Hill where there God declares His love for His people. It is there that He shows Himself and all those truths are embedded in Genesis 1 through 11. I know there is discussion on the days of creation like whether it's a 24 hour day or an age or season. I am 24 hour and 7 day guy and we can have that discussion. Genesis 1 through 11 is not a science book but it is Divinely revealed history. Jesus and the Apostles quoted it as history. I quote it as history for I believe there was Someone there at the creation and it was not me or any other scientist. It was God who was there. In the language of the day it has revealed to us the answer. It is not the unholy Trinity of Carl Sagan dealing with space, time and matter. You give enough space and enough time to matter then boom you get this. That is what he said, the apostle of the materialist. The cosmos says that's all there is, all there was and that's all there ever will be. Space, time and matter, give it long enough and that's what you come up with. I can't make that leap of faith in the dark.

I go back to Genesis 1:1 which says [1] *In the beginning* (time), *God created the heavens* (space) *and the earth* (matter). Here is space, time and matter in the glorious intricacies, yet this majestic transcendency is there because God created it and it shouts the glory and majesty. When you vacuum that out of an educational system where people are left into the materialist world of who am I, why am I here then that's why we have

children coming out for their own carpe diem which is to walk into a school and make their purpose with a machine gun – when you have removed the glorious majesty that man is made in the image of God and that God has a purpose. When we had rebelled against that purpose our God is so glorious and gracious even though He didn't need us wanted us, and even though we needed Him we didn't want Him yet He sent His Son, not to Mars Hill with vain speculations about how man can invent God and religion but to Calvary to give a true religion out of a relationship with grace in Jesus Christ. That is what God has done.

When I was a kid I used to play the game Travel. Everyone buys a coca cola and then you drink some. Once you drink some then you play Travel. Then you look on the bottom of the bottle to find out where it was bottled and how it got to you. Whoever had the one who was bottled the farthest away received the free coke. The creation does not allow atheistic materialistic description of its existence. I don't care what you see in the creation for when you turn it upside down it has written underneath it 'made and distributed by heaven and the hand of God.' This last week we found out that the designer of Obama Care says at 75 years of age you just ought to move on, so much for Moses and his ministry at age 80. God has made us in His image and that's how He sustains us. By God's grace in Jesus Christ we can be redeemed and we can be right with God. So I don't have to suppress these things.

Here is the takeaway. If the Biblical teaching of creation is not true then there is no sin, no need to repent, no judgment to face, no Gospel to believe and no salvation to receive. That's why I contend and defend the doctrine of creation. I think that is why people work so hard to deny it, because they don't want to repent, confess their sins or want a Gospel to surrender to. We don't want to know the God of creation because we want to create ourselves as god. We want, unless God intervenes, Mars Hill and not Calvary's Hill.

God has sent you here and I don't know what your response is but the three Paul faced were that some mocked, some wanted to talk more and some believed. You may be mocking today. I love you and I want you to know Him. Maybe you want to talk more with me about this and I'm available if that is what you want. You may say today that you don't want Mars Hill but you want Calvary's Hill where the Creator amazingly died for you and me so that we could be right with Him and He is risen. I beg you to come to Him today. One reason I beg you, but not the only, is that what you have doesn't work. It's a life of despair and death. Would you come to Him? He will give you everlasting life. Who am I? You are made in the image of God, saved by the grace of God. Where did I come from? You came from heaven's glory and grace. Why am I here? You are here for the joy of His glory. Where am I headed? I am headed to be with Him forever and ever from Calvary's Hill to Zion's Hill and glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word and thank You for the privilege to deal with God's Word. Help us to be faithful to it. Help us Father, to embrace it and thank You that it makes men and women with world and life views that can do science well, philosophy well, history well, work well, athletics well, academics well because we know the God of majesty and glory not only as Creator but as Redeemer for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.