

## Meet the Creator

by David & Virginia Orton

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### The Areopagus Address, Acts 17.

Two thousand years ago a short, bald, and beetle-browed rabbi addressed the famed Athenian Areopagus on Mars Hill.

With a tradition going back to pre-Classical times, the Areopagus presided as the governing council for the city-state of Athens and as a marketplace of new ideas, the Athenians given to the endless debate of every new philosophy.

It was to this august body of leaders and thinkers that the apostle Paul spoke (Acts 17:22-34).

Alluding to the Athenian altar to the “unknown God” he declared to them that this God has now been made known—that he is, in fact, the creator of the world and all that is. Thus, unlike the humanly created gods, he is the uncreated God: infinite and absolute.

And yet, this creator-God is so intrinsic to the creation that Paul quoted one of their own philosophers, Epimenides, as saying that “In him we live and move and have our being”. In fact, again quoting a classical poet, Aratus, he points out that “we are indeed his offspring”.

And thus God is not generated by the universe. We are not to think that God is a created thing—an idol fashioned by man. Rather, he is the personal infinite God who has fashioned man in his *own* image.

### The Creator

In fact, before there was any created thing, this uncreated God was “in the beginning” (Gen 1:1). It is he who brought matter into existence *ex-nihilo*—out of nothing. Thus unlike Greek philosophy, or its modern materialist counterpart (i.e. *scientism*), matter and energy are not eternal. God is transcendent—not *distant* as deism claims, but *distinct* from his creation and not bound by the moral vagaries and temporalities of human experience. Because God made the world, he also personally sustains and governs it. He is therefore also immanent—present *with* the world, but not part *of* it. Thus he is not to be confused with pantheism—a god so immersed in the natural world that he is indistinguishable from it. Similar to deism, such a god can have no influence over his own creation. He is therefore no solution to the suffering and death that ravages humankind.

Moreover, God's transcendent Being means that man, who is the creature, can only relate to his Creator *covenantally*. This insight is the heart of biblical revelation. Man does not relate to God *metaphysically* through a commonly shared essence or being; rather, man is made in God's *moral* image (Gen. 1:26) and is subordinate to God *ethically*. All of God's personal relations with mankind are *covenantal*—subject to ethical requirements. They are not *law-less* relations.

God's moral nature governs this world. It is revealed through his law as his design for human flourishing through ethical obedience (Rom 7:4-14). As Paul taught, the creation itself, as God's workmanship, reveals his invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature (Rom 1:19-22). They are “clearly perceived” in the external world and in the internal constitution of man (Rom 2:15). This clear universal revelation is inescapable, rendering man morally accountable to his Creator. Thus, while as free moral agents we are not coerced to obey God's law, we are free to obey or to disobey. Nevertheless, we cannot escape the choice nor its consequences. We therefore relate to God as either ‘covenant-keepers’ or ‘covenant-breakers’.

Accordingly, the human problem is not *metaphysical* but *moral*. In ethical rebellion against God, humankind seeks to be autonomous, setting aside the law of their Creator to become ‘as gods’ (Gen 3:5): a law unto themselves, autonomously determining what is lawful and unlawful (i.e. good and evil). In covenantal hostility toward God, autonomous man suppresses the clear truth of God and exchanges it for a lie—an unreality. “Believing they are wise”, they in actuality have become “fools and futile in their thinking” (Rom 1:20-23). Dislocated from God's design for flourishing, humanity has received the just penalty for its lawlessness in death itself (Gen 2:17; Deut 30:15, 19; Rom 6:23).

Even so, God created humankind and history for one purpose—that we may know him and live.

**The Creator's Courtroom**

Thus, Paul announced to the Athenians that God, having made himself known, commands all peoples of the earth to turn to him, for he has fixed a day when he will judge the world, setting-it-to-rights, through a man whom he has appointed. It is against this man, as the standard of human perfection – who alone perfectly obeyed God's law – that we will be ethically measured and judged. And he has confirmed this by raising him from the dead.

This man is none other than Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, in accordance with Scripture, was buried, and on the third day raised from the dead, again in fulfilment of Scripture, and appeared to many witnesses (1 Cor 15:3-8).

Only one who was both fully God and fully man could covenantally represent humankind to God, while also representing God to humanity. Thus, demonstrating God's unfailing justice in penalising man's lawlessness and his immeasurable love in paying that penalty vicariously (Latin *vicarius* 'substitute'). Not only this, but through his bodily death and resurrection, those who place their trust in Jesus, as God's payment for sin (i.e. ethical transgression of God's righteous standard), are: (1) *legally acquitted* from the penalty of sin, which is death, receiving instead the free gift of everlasting life and declared righteous as a gift through faith (Rom 3:21-28; 5:9; Eph 2:8-9); (2) *covenantally restored* to God in a new humanity in Christ (Rom 5:12-20); and (3) *supernaturally empowered* by the Holy Spirit to live in ethical obedience to Jesus as Lord (Rom 8:1-11).

[What is the gospel? Find out more.](#)

**Reliable evidence**

These facts were transmitted to Paul through a tradition (1 Cor 15:3-8), which critical scholarship dates from within 2-3 years of the event (i.e. Christ's death and resurrection). In terms of the standards of historiography this is quite exceptional as, for example, the earliest biography of Alexander the Great dates centuries after his death. Not only this, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written a mere 20 years after the event (AD 53-57). Additionally, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the New Testament, over 5,000 of the earliest Greek manuscripts are extant, in addition to later Medieval Latin manuscripts as well as other languages. This makes it by far the most reliable document of Greco-Roman antiquity. The historicity of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is well attested.

Joseph Boot explains the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the evidence for his life, death and resurrection:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7Of\\_VYF\\_GA&t=1359s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7Of_VYF_GA&t=1359s)

Refer also to Habermas and Wallace for scholarly attestation to the reliability of Scripture and the historicity of the Resurrection:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyABBZe5o68>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5znVUFHqO4Q>

**How do we respond to these facts?**

The same question was asked two millennia ago, with Peter replying:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38

There are three steps: (1) Repent; (2) Be baptised for the forgiveness of sins; and (3) Receive the gift of Holy Spirit.

*First*, we are commanded to “repent”. But why? Because of the final ethical judgement, the cosmic court, before which we

will all stand on that final day, measured against the standard of Christ.

In the original language (i.e. Greek) of the text the word ‘repent’ means to change one’s *behaviour* through a complete change of *mind*.

A changed behaviour demands a change of belief systems: a rejection of created gods, the gods of our own making—of every thought system that originates in our ethical rebellion against God and in our autonomous reason. As we bring our *reason* into the obedience of divine *revelation*, that is, the historical factuality of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and our Saviour, we begin a new journey as a disciple, and thus, of behavioural change.

*Second*, we are commanded to “be baptised...for the forgiveness of sins”. The Greek word *baptizo* means to be immersed. To obey the Lord in the waters of baptism is the next step of discipleship. It is not an option, but a command.

Apart from the creator-God possessing the right to command us, what is the significance of water baptism?

It is a physical act signifying a spiritual reality. It signals our immersion into a new identity, into Christ—into his death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-14). Christ, as the *last Adam* (1 Cor 15:45), died once-and-for-all: 2,000 years ago, as humanity's representative, he died an historically factual death for every person who has lived, is living, or will yet live. Through death he conquered death: his death was the terminal point of the old order of sin and death. Moreover, as the *second man* (1 Cor 15:47), the resurrection from the dead was the beginning of a new order: a new world of righteousness and life. The fallen order that our first parents thrust humankind into, through their *disobedience*, has been terminated in Christ through his *obedience*. He achieved – on humanity's behalf – what we and our first parents failed to do (Rom 3:23). For those who put their trust in Christ there is both a legal and experiential transfer from the old order to the new (Rom 3:21-26; 5:12-20; 8:1-11). We are freed both *legally* from the *penalty* of sin (forgiveness) and *experientially* from the *power* of sin (ethical holiness).

*Third*, we are commanded to “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. Christianity is supernatural. The power that created and sustains the universe is now available to us as a free gift from God. The *gift* of the Holy Spirit is not earned or conjured, it is received on the same basis we receive the forgiveness of sins: *gratis*.

Through receiving the Holy Spirit we are regenerated, not *physically* but *spiritually* (Jn 3:1-21; Tit 3:5). God promises that when you receive Christ and believe in him, you have the right to be a child of God, born not according to man’s will, but God’s (Jn 1:12-13). Both by right of creation and now redemption you are his, chosen by God the Father before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4-8; Jn 15:16, 19). Through regeneration by the Spirit you become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17); God is now your Father. You have been born into a new family, receiving God the Father’s own DNA—a new motivation to love and obey him (Heb 8:10-12; Jn 5:19-20). As a child of God you are a member of his family. Ask him to lead you to others who love and obey him (Matt 7:8-11; Ps 23:2-3; 25:9; 27:11; 31:3). His will for you is that you be nurtured within a community of believers (Acts 2:42; 4:32-37).

As a child of God his plan for you is to mature into spiritual adulthood (Heb 5:11-6:3; Eph 4:11-16). This will take a hunger for God and his Word, the Scriptures, requiring us to be teachable to God and his servants (1 Pet 2:2; Heb 5:13-6:3; 13:7, 17; Jas 1:21; 4:6-10; Psa 19; 25:4-10; 119). The Scriptures, though written by men, are authored by God’s Spirit, thus revealing his mind to us (2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Thes 2:13; 2 Pet 1:19-20). Because sin has distorted our view of reality, we are commanded to renew our thinking according to his Word so that we can interpret reality (Rom 12:1-2; Psa 19:7-13). The Holy Spirit who counsels and leads us will always act in accord with his written Word, the Bible (Jn 14:15-17; 16:13-15; 17:17).

The Holy Spirit is the executive agent of the Godhead: the Father *thinks* it, the Son *speaks* it, and the Holy Spirit *does* it. He is the power through which Christ now lives his victorious life in us. In Christ we are no longer bound by sin and death! By faith you can now receive the power of resurrection life—the *gift* of the Holy Spirit himself!

The Scripture says, “And without *faith* it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6). ‘Faith’ in contemporary thought is often understood to mean “blind faith”, summarised best by the evangelist of New Atheism, Richard Dawkins, saying "Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence". Biblical faith, in contrast, means “to be persuaded” or “to come to trust” (From NT Greek *pistis*). This can only occur when there is sufficient evidence. The first Christians were persuaded because of the empirical evidence of Christ's deity as the Son of God: miracles, forgiveness of sins, the prophecies and foretelling of his

death and resurrection.

Faith rests supremely in the historicity of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead as the fulfillment of God's promises in Scripture. This is recorded by eyewitness accounts to these events, which were not "done in a corner" but took place in public (Acts 26:26). He appeared to Mary (Jn 20:11-18), Peter and James personally (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5, 7), to the rest of the disciples collectively (Matt 28:16-17; Mk 16:14; Lk 24:33-37), and to 500 others en masse! (1 Cor 15:3-7). The apostles witnessed "many convincing proofs" of Christ's resurrection from the dead (Acts 1:3), witnessing not to "cleverly devised myths" but to that "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands" (2 Pet 1:16; 1 John 1:1).

The evidence for Christ's resurrection is attested to by the otherwise inexplicable transformation that occurred in the lives of his disciples following this event. This includes the miraculous conversion of Saul of Tarsus from a zealous Jewish rabbi, who murderously persecuted early Christians as heretics, to become the leading apostle of Christianity, advancing its cause to all nations, and dying a martyr's death for Christ's name. This evidence is further multiplied throughout history by the untold millions of transformed lives, representing all peoples and nations, whose trust in the Creator-Redeemer God – because of the historicity of Jesus' death and resurrection – has transformed both their lives and entire cultures.

#### **The response**

Returning to the scene on Mars Hill, what was the response to Paul's address? The Scripture records that when they heard of the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement some *mocked*, others *inquired* further, and some *believed*.

What will your response be: mocking, inquiring or believing?

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