

Respectful disagreement before the Creator

Lesson overview

Follow Paul's respectful reasoning in Athens and his proclamation of the Creator and risen Judge. The class weighs whether respect requires agreement, giving reasons from Acts 17.



Passage

Acts 17:16–34



Focus statement

The Creator gives life to all and calls everyone to repent before the risen Judge, so we should weigh beliefs by his revelation and speak with truthful respect.



Age-focused objective

Explain one difference between Paul's account and a competing claim, and show why a respectful answer need not pretend contradictory claims are identical. Learners may explain aloud or point to evidence.



Memory verse

Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.

Acts 17:25, CSB

Before the class

Read Teacher preparation, then rehearse this guide with your selected resources.

Choose, then print. Select one illustration and either activity A or its replacement B. Print single-sided A4 portrait at actual size. Print Printable Resources, pages 1–4 and 6, once for the teacher. Add page 5 if choosing illustration A.

Student copies. For activity A, print Student Pages, page 2 once as a shared position display. Page 1 is optional lined notes: print one per learner who wants it, kept separately from shared activity work. Activity B needs no activity copies; the optional notes page remains available.

Have ready. No cutting is needed. Learners can point to the shared display or respond aloud. For illustration B, have a sheet bearing “I disagree”. Keep a spare blank sheet for any covered words or later reveal, and a Bible or the supplied readings available. Learners may speak, point or dictate; personal notes need not be handed in.

How the lesson unfolds

Trace Paul’s address from a familiar altar to the Creator and risen Judge. Weigh whether respect requires agreement, giving and hearing reasons from the passage.



Paul listens and reasons in a real setting

Notice how Paul attends to his hearers’ setting while recognising their need to know the living God.



God is Creator and Giver, not our dependent creation

Trace the direction of dependence: God gives life; people cannot make or sustain their Creator.



The risen Judge calls for repentance

Hear the universal call to repent before the risen Judge, then consider the different responses Luke records.



Explain and apply the passage

Choose the main reinforcement or its replacement: reasoned discussion or pool textual evidence. Bring the explanation back to the passage and its fitting response.



Remember, respond and pray

Use the whole memory verse to check the passage’s meaning, then invite a quiet response of faith and obedience without requiring personal disclosure.

Transition

Ask, “What did Paul say the Scriptures make us wise for?” Recall salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Welcome a newcomer with the unit’s thread: God makes Himself known, and His word directs us to the Saviour. Today Paul meets people who do not begin with Timothy’s knowledge of Scripture. Pray for understanding, courage and patient listening.

Lesson

Introduce the question, “Can I take someone seriously while disagreeing with them?” Give a moment to think without asking for a personal dispute. Explain that Paul is waiting in Athens, a city full of idols. We will hear what troubles him, what he notices and what he says. Explain *idols* as objects treated as gods, and *resurrection* as being raised bodily from death. The Areopagus is the named setting for the address that follows.

1. Paul listens and reasons in a real setting

Show Printable Resources, page 1, *Paul notices and proclaims*. Describe the setting without reconstructing uncertain architecture or staging worship.

READ ALOUD

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed when he saw that the city was full of idols.

¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, “What is this ignorant show-off trying to say?” Others replied, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities”—because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ They took him and brought him to the Areopagus, and said, “May we learn about this new teaching you are presenting?”

²⁰ Because what you say sounds strange to us, and we want to know what these things mean.”

²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new.

²² Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect.

²³ For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

Acts 17:16–23, CSB



Ask

How does Paul use what he has noticed?



Listen for

He begins with the altar and then proclaims the God they do not know.



If needed

Point to “this I proclaim to you”. Ask whether he leaves them with their ignorance.



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING)

Paul notices what people worship and uses an altar labelled for an unknown god to begin. He does not say that ignorance is enough. He proclaims the God they do not know. Listening carefully helps us understand the question someone is asking; it does not require us to agree with every answer.

2. God is Creator and Giver, not our dependent creation

Show Printable Resources, page 2, *Who gives life?*. Follow the direction from Creator to humanity. Distinguish shared creaturely dependence from saving adoption.



READ ALOUD

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands.

²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.

²⁶ From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live.

²⁷ He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

²⁸ For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’

²⁹ Since, then, we are God’s offspring, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.

Acts 17:24–29, CSB

**Ask**

Which way should the arrow on Printable Resources, page 2 point: from us giving God life, or from God giving us life?

**Listen for**

From the Creator to humanity. Verse 25 names Him as giver of life and breath.

**If needed**

Read the words “he himself gives everyone life and breath” again from the printed verse.

 SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING)

The direction matters. God made the world and gives us life and breath. We do not give Him existence or keep Him alive. Every nationality shares human origin and dependence on Him. The poets’ words about being His offspring refer here to our creaturely dependence; they do not mean everyone already has saving fellowship with God. Paul uses a familiar saying to challenge making God out of material things. The Creator is not a product of our imagination.

3. The risen Judge calls for repentance

Show Printable Resources, page 3, *The risen Judge calls for repentance*. Explain accountability and the real resurrection, without promising that every truthful conversation receives the same response.

 READ ALOUD

³⁰ “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent,

³¹ because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him, but others said, “We’d like to hear from you again about this.”

³³ So Paul left their presence.

³⁴ However, some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Acts 17:30–34, CSB



Ask

Why does the call to repent concern everyone?



Listen for

All depend on God and will answer to His appointed Judge; Jesus' resurrection confirms that authority.



If needed

Point to “all people everywhere” and “judge the world”.

SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING)

Repent means turn from sin and false worship towards the living God. God calls everyone, including us, to do this. He will judge righteously through Jesus, whom He raised from the dead. The resurrection is a real event establishing His authority, not just a comforting thought. Luke then records that some mocked, some wanted to hear more and some believed. A faithful explanation does not guarantee that everyone responds alike.

Show Printable Resources, page 4, *Respectful listening; truthful challenge*. Bring the manner and content together before the discussion.

Recall the Creator-to-humanity arrow on Printable Resources, page 2. Invite a learner to explain why reversing it would contradict verse 25. Accept pointing plus a partner's explanation. Then recall the accountability display on Printable Resources, page 3.

SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING)

Dependence on our Creator exposes the wrong of living as though we answer only to ourselves. The risen Judge is also the Saviour. In Luke 24:46–47, Jesus explains that His suffering and resurrection lead to repentance and forgiveness being proclaimed in His name to all nations. Jesus, the eternal Son made human, died for sinners and rose bodily. We turn from sin and trust Him for forgiveness. We need His grace as much as the neighbour whose claim we examine, so our reply should be truthful and humble.

Choose one illustration. Use this in place of an additional example while drawing the teaching together. Let the passage govern what the comparison can establish.

Illustration A: Listening without surrendering the question

Show Printable Resources, page 5. Two imagined teenagers are listening to one another. What would show that someone understood a claim fairly? Would that require agreeing with it?

Connect and limit: In Acts 17 Paul notices his listeners and reasons with them, but challenges their account of God. A quiet conversation illustrates manner; the image cannot tell us what either person believes.

Illustration B: A quotation with its meaning missing

Write “I disagree” on a sheet. Read these two fictional replies in a calm voice: “I disagree. Only a fool would think that.” Then: “I disagree because your conclusion does not follow from that reason. Have I understood you fairly?” Ask what each reply addresses: the person’s worth or the claim and its reasons. Do not imitate or assign a mocking role to a learner.

Connect and limit: Paul’s content and manner belong together. A polite tone alone does not make a claim true, and an unwelcome truth is not automatically disrespectful. Use Acts 17:22–31 to judge both.

Application

Choose one of the following approaches. The replacement uses the same passage and conclusion; do not run both.

Option A: Does respect require agreement?

Display Student Pages, page 2 and read the statement, “If I respect someone, I must agree with their beliefs.” Explain that respect means treating a person with dignity. Invite provisional agreement, disagreement or a request to clarify. Learners may point, place a paper token, speak or pass. Positions help the conversation; a vote cannot decide biblical truth.

Give and hear reasons

Ask for a reason from Acts 17:16–31. Where does Paul attend to his listeners, and where does he challenge them? Model a fair restatement of one contribution before asking for a different reason. Then let partners practise with this supplied claim: “People make God what they want Him to be.” One explains what that claim means; the other offers a respectful answer using verses 24–29. No one must pretend to believe the claim. They may work together on one reply, speak quietly or point while you read. Keep family religions and personal disputes outside the task.

Clarify the conclusion

Hear one reply and its biblical reason. Ask, “Did we represent the claim fairly, and did our answer make the disagreement clear?” Give space for a learner to improve the wording or evidence. Then return to the original statement about respect and agreement. Draw the conclusion from Paul’s listening and proclamation: we can honour a person while truthfully disagreeing and calling attention to the risen Jesus. A public declaration of belief is unnecessary.



Ask

How does Paul's encounter show that respect and disagreement can belong together?



Listen for

He notices and reasons with people, while proclaiming the Creator, rejecting human-made divinity and calling everyone to repent before the risen Judge.



If needed

Compare Acts 17:22–23 with 24–25 and 30–31.

Our own dependence and need of Christ's grace give reasons for humility. Truthful respect is more than avoiding offence or winning an argument.

Option B: Two readers, one explanation

Work together in two loose groups, or as one class. One finds a point where Paul attends to the listeners; the other finds a point where he contradicts a belief. Share the relevant phrases and combine them into a sentence beginning "Paul respects his listeners while ...".

Draw it together: Use verses 22–23 beside 24–31. If "respect" becomes silent agreement, let the second passage correct it. Conclude with the Creator's call to repent before the risen Judge, without asking learners to represent their family's religion.

Close

Remember the verse and check understanding

Show Printable Resources, page 6. Read the complete verse below once and say the reference. Learners may listen, point or join. Paul challenges the idea that God depends on our service. He is not forbidding grateful service: life, breath and everything we have are His gifts.

SCRIPTURE

²⁵ Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.

Acts 17:25, CSB

Every breath is a gift from the Creator. This gives us reason for gratitude and humility when speaking to another person who also depends on Him.

Help a partner remember. Partners choose one printed sense group each and explain its meaning to one another. One offers its opening words while the other completes it, using the poster for support; swap if willing. A learner may point, listen or ask the teacher to model both turns. Finish by reading the whole verse and reference together so the parts remain connected.



Ask

How do these three lessons help us explain the God we depend on and the Saviour we need? Give one connection, then show its passage.



Listen for

Psalm 19 moves from creation's witness to God's instruction and our need for cleansing. 2 Timothy 3 names salvation through faith in Christ. Acts 17 proclaims the Creator and risen Judge while modelling attention to hearers. A learner may explain one connection; do not require a recital of all three.



If needed

Offer the three starting points: "The heavens declare ..."; "wise for salvation through faith in ..."; "he himself gives everyone ...". Ask which connection a learner wants to explain.

Respond and pray

Student page 1 offers optional lined notes and private reflection. Learners may listen, think, sketch or write; nothing personal needs to be handed in.

Invite quiet reflection on our own response to the Creator and risen Jesus. Pray for repentance, faith, humility and patient courage in conversation. No learner must represent or defend a family belief.

During the week, return to Acts 17:25 and thank God for the life He gives. Think through a truthful, respectful way of explaining this verse; no report of a real conversation is required.

Learners may pray silently or listen. A correct answer, completed task or repeated prayer does not establish saving faith.

Teacher reflection after the lesson

Record actual time and which explanations helped. Could learners state the message, give a textual reason and explain the changed response in the task? Note one point to recall next time. Keep personal information out of the record and distinguish understanding from the work of God in someone's heart.

Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.