Grace Baptist Church & Emmaus Fellowship Dr. Rick Griffith

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NIV 40 Minutes

**Are Free Thinkers Free or Thinkers?**

***Acts 17:16-34***

**Topic:** Evangelism

**Subject:** How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”(i.e. slaves to the latest opinions)?

**Complement:** Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way.

**Purpose:** The listeners will share about Christ’s resurrection to a “free thinker” they know.

**Meditation:** Acts 17:31 “He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

**Reading:** Acts 17:16-34

# Introduction

### Interest: [CCC cold turkey sharing with philosophy majors frustrated me.]

#### “Oh, no! Not another one!” That’s what I said inside—but outwardly I kept calm, cool, and focused. After all, I had shared this little yellow booklet a lot. I had been active with Campus Crusade as a student sharing Christ on campus for three years. Witnessing had become a lifestyle for me at my university—California State University at Hayward—or “Hay U” for short!

#### Each week I’d go out with a friend during class break on campus to share the Four Spiritual Laws with people at random. We’d sit down and seek to build some rapport first, generally by asking what major the student had.

#### We tried to adapt our approach for different types of people:

##### To business majors we were very pragmatic. “What’s the bottom line?” they’d say. So we’d say, “Hey, it’s this. You’ve offended a holy God and owe Him a lot in the debit column.”

##### The music majors were more feeling-oriented people, so I tried to emphasize God’s love and care to them.

##### But I still remember how I felt upon discovering that the person was a philosophy major. These were my “Oh, no! Not another one!” experiences. “Oh, boy, I’d say. Another philosophy guy. This is going to take a long time and be an uphill battle the whole way!”

###### I’d ask if he had heard of the Four Spiritual Laws.

###### He’d say something like:

“Four? How do you know there’s only four? Or why can’t there be three—or two—or one or none?”

“Spiritual? What makes ‘em spiritual? Isn’t that just your view?”

“And Laws? We got enough laws around here!”

I’d feel lucky to get through Law 1.

### Need: What do you say to “free thinkers”?

#### Getting them to make a definite statement is as hard as holding a wet fish—just when you have a hold on what they’re saying, they wriggle and slip away from you.

#### Singapore calls these people “free thinkers” ‘cuz they’re not bound by teachings of any particular religion—thus the title “free.” Rather, they think for themselves.

#### Maybe even as I speak, a specific person comes to mind for you—that office co-worker or school mate, your neighbor or friend at the club.

##### He or she is a challenge to talk to about your faith because—after all—this person seems at least as successful as you are on the outside.

##### But inwardly you know that this person is only a *so-called* “free thinker.”

###### He or she may be free from the dogma of a certain religion, but he or she is a *slave* to his own passions.

###### And a “thinker”? Many do think much about things, but others are “free thinkers” to escape having to think about anything of real substance—and as a result he is a slave to the next fad to hit Singapore.

### Subject: So how do you share Christ with “free thinkers”? What do you say to people who appear intellectual but are slaves to the latest opinions?

### Background:

#### Singapore is filled with “free thinkers” as it continues towards secularization and modernization. The “no religion” category has climbed from 13% in 1980 to 14% in 1990 to almost 15% in 2000—but surely it’s higher than this.

#### Today, to see the parallels between “free thinkin’” Singapore and the ancient world, as promised by Tom Chandler, RMG Tours is sponsoring a tour of Europe this very morning. That’s R—“Rick” M—“Mmmmm” G—Griffith Tours, in case you were wondering.

#### Our itinerary today comprises a look at ancient Athens. Athens was the Singapore counterpart of the first century—the most sophisticated and threatening place in the Roman Empire to share Christ.

##### It was here that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle made their mark on the world.

##### One scholar notes, “At Athens Christianity met the best thought of the day… It was the most celebrated city in Greece, the home of literature and art, famous in politics and thought. Although under the Romans at this time, Athens was still the intellectual center and the university city of the world, so that its importance can hardly be exaggerated.” (Griffith Thomas, 343)

##### It’s been said that, “From an aesthetic standpoint, Athens was unrivaled for its exquisite architecture and statues.” (Keener in Fernando, 473)

##### For example, on the elevated part of the city called the Acropolis stood the Parthenon—

###### A magnificent temple to the city’s goddess Athene, which had already been there for 500 years before Paul showed up.

###### Interesting how the Acropolis was 512 feet tall—almost the same as our 518 foot Timah Hill. But ours has a police post at the top whereas theirs was policed by their goddess!

###### Even today the Parthenon is considered “one of the most visually satisfying buildings… in the world.”

### Text: So Paul could identify with how we feel about ministering amidst prosperous paganism when he entered this city in Acts 17:16. Note our tour guide in your bulletin.

### Transition: Here in Acts 17 we’ll see some principles from Paul’s example on how to share Christ to philosophical intellectuals. The key principle in talking to “free thinkers” that I glean from verses 16-21 is…

# I. Focus on Christ’s resurrection (16-21).

[Make sure people hear you say that Jesus is alive today.]

## [Issue: The Areopagus asked Paul to explain about Jesus rising from the dead (16-21).]

(How did the resurrection affect Paul? Worship of a living Savior affected Paul’s…)

### *Heart*: Idolatry in Athens disturbed Paul (16).

#### The Parthenon was considered one of the great marvels of ancient days.

#### But the beauty of sculptures and architecture didn’t impress Paul—he saw them from a religious standpoint for what they were as temples, shrines, altars and idols that insulted the resurrected, living Christ.

#### Do idols also distress you? How do you feel when you enter temples here in Singapore? Most tourists look at them for their architectural value and totally miss that they represent man’s rejection of God. Paul notes in Romans 1:23 that such depictions “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”

(Paul’s disturbed heart didn’t just depress and isolate him. He *acted* on it with a…)

### *Strategy*: Paul followed his normal practice of ministering to the most receptive parts of society first but he also brought his message into the open forum (17).

#### Jews and God-fearing Gentiles heard him in the synagogue (17a).

#### Shoppers in the marketplace also listened in his street evangelism (17b).

##### Paul wasn’t a shopper—he was a stopper!

##### At the shopping malls of his day he stopped people to tell them about One who could provide the kind of fulfillment that money couldn’t buy.

(But in verse 18 Paul had his biggest evangelistic challenge yet—the philosophers of his day. There are many parallels between these and the secular so-called “free thinkers” in our city—intellectuals without biblical background. So what message did Paul share? What did he say? Verse 18 gives us the…)

### *Content*: It was Paul’s message about *Jesus and His resurrection* that met with debate by the pagan philosophers (18).

#### Who were these Epicureans (18)?

##### Epicureans said that happiness or pleasure is the chief goal of man.

##### They said that since there is no afterlife you may as well “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” By Paul’s time Epicureanism had degenerated into a system focussed on sex.

#### What did the Stoics teach (18)? They were the opposite of the Epicureans.

##### Stoics said reality is in natural reason—cause and effect pervade all so you may as well adjust yourself for harmony and tranquillity through strong ethics.

##### Stoicism is essentially what we see in Buddhism and Confucianism. And frankly, there’s much good to be said about living in a reasonable manner, adjusting ourselves to be in harmony with others.

##### But Stoicism leads to materialism. If we focus only on the here and now, we will center our lives on material things.

### *Interest*: Despite their differences from Paul, these philosophers still gave him the chance to express his views to the Areopagus—the learned society and guardians of religion and morals of Athens (19-21).

(What would *you* say to these intellectuals? Paul could have gotten off on tangents about morality, architecture, the lifestyles of these philosophers, their educational philosophy, etc.)

### But verse 18 says Paul focused on Christ’s resurrection—why?

#### He answered philosophy with facts—the reality of the resurrection of Christ was a historical fact that they had to deal with.

#### Paul also wanted them to see that Christ could change their lives—and he couldn’t convince them of this until he first convinced them that Christ is alive. A dead man could affect you through his writings, but he cannot influence your life directly in a relationship with him.

(Now what do you tell intellectual “free thinkers” today?)

## Do the “free thinkers” in your life know *you* as one who believes that Jesus is *alive* today?

### Do you talk about Christ as being your friend more than being your philosopher? Do you share with “free thinkers” at all? Or are they “too hard” for you?

### Paul shared the resurrection with receptive people first, but he didn’t neglect “free thinkers.” He was committed to reaching all segments of society. Do you give priority to receptive people?

#### Like children? This may be the most important ministry in this church.

#### Or youth? This ministry reaches those grappling with life’s choices at a very foundational time in their lives.

#### Those in crisis also are often very receptive.

#### Each group needs to hear that we worship a living Savior, risen from the dead!

(As we see Paul’s message itself in verses 22-31, we’ll see that it is unlike any other in the Bible. It has no quotes from the OT—these men didn’t even know the OT. It also doesn’t get off on tangents. Rather, the sermon gives us our second principle in ministering to “free thinkers” which is to…)

# II. Draw interest in the basics (22-31).

[Get “free thinkers” to see the real issues about God—and do it in an interesting way.]

## Content: Paul got these philosophers thinking about Christ’s resurrection by sharing basic Christian truths in an engaging manner (22-31).

(The starting point of his witnessing was the fact of…)

### *God*: He provoked interest in the true God by using interesting illustrations that his listeners could identify with (22-28).

#### Paul *started where they were* and acknowledged common ground (22).

##### He said they were religious, which was neither flattery nor was it a criticism. (as the KJV renders it: “Ye are too superstitious”). Fernando, 475

##### Paul was simply finding common ground—

###### They had a belief in God. He had a belief in God.

###### The Bible starts out this way in Genesis 1 and John 1—both by starting with God’s existence.

#### Paul used the *familiar to introduce the unfamiliar* to show that the Athenians feared God as one among many gods (23).

##### They knew about this altar to an unknown god.

##### Having such an altar was a safety precaution then to make sure that every god gets at least some worship so a jealous god wouldn’t strike the city! Fernando, 475

##### Paul noted that they admitted their need at least to this extent.

##### Notice that, even though Paul was infuriated by their idolatry, he still spoke with restraint and respect—a good model for us. Yet…

#### Paul expressed *God’s true person* (24-28)

##### God reveals himself in nature to show the futility of idolatry (24-25).

###### As the world’s Creator and Ruler, he cannot be contained (24).

###### As the Self-Sufficient Giver of Life, he has no needs (25).

##### God reveals himself in man to show He is worthy of allegiance (26-28).

###### Since all have their source in Him, there’s but one God for all (26a).

###### He shows his providence for all people by determining when and where each should live (26b). He decided, “The Tohs will live in Toa Payoh.”

###### God’s care should result in man seeking and finding him (27-28).

### *Repentance*: He *applied his message*, saying that since God is far greater than man or idols, we should repent from low views of God (29-30).

#### In the past (before Christ’s coming) God overlooked man’s ignorance that thought that our creator God was inferior to us like an idol of manmade materials (29-30a).

#### But now (since Christ’s coming) God demands universal repentance (30b).

### *Judgment*: Paul then warned his hearers that Christ would hold them accountable (31a).

(“OK, OK,” his listeners may have said. “But that’s just your opinion. What proof do you have to make such outrageous claims?” Paul answers with the…)

### *Resurrection*: He preached Christ’s resurrection as proof that he is also judge (31b).

## We also need to focus “free thinkers” on the basics—especially Christ’s resurrection.

### Begin with who God is—not irrelevant issues like their leaders, matters of minutia, etc.

#### In 1993 SBC students conducted a survey of 100 Chinese youths, ages 16-20.

##### To the question, “Do you think there are any moral absolutes (things that are definitely wrong, such as the Ten Commandments)?” only 8% said such moral absolutes exist!

##### Question 20 asked, “Do you know of any scientific problems with the theory of evolution?” Only 5% say *any* problems with evolution!

##### Another question was more basic: Do you think God exists? How many do you think were atheists—people who say there is no God? 41% were atheists!

#### Nevertheless, like Paul did in verse 30-31, tell them they will be responsible for who they think God is.

### Lead them up to a decision of what to do with Jesus who’s alive today. Ask, “What are you going to do with the resurrection of Christ?”

### We need to be interesting too!

#### Start where they’re at by using the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar.

##### For example, Singapore has been called the “City of Fear.” People have fear of falling behind (kiasu), fear of not having enough money (ironic in one of Asia’s wealthiest economies!), and fear of death.

##### So meet “free thinkers” where they are t—familiar with fear—and bring them to the unfamiliar, telling them how Christ has delivered you from fear.

#### Provoke thought by showing you understand something of their teachings. Verse 28 quotes their pagan poets.

#### Use strategies that minister to them. Ajith Fernando, leader of Youth For Christ in Sri Lanka, shares this account of how YFC had to change their strategy (p. 485).

(So we should focus on Christ’s resurrection, and draw interest in the basics. But if we do this will we always be successful? No, verses 32-34 note that we need to…)

# III. Trust God with the results (32-34).

[Evangelism is God’s work and we need to place faith in his ability to change lives.]

## Results: Paul’s emphasis on Christ’s resurrection brought a mixed response (32-34).

### *Ridicule*: Some *rejected* any idea about life after death (32a).

### *Procrastination*: Some were *undecided but open* to hear more about the resurrection in the future (32b).

### *Acceptance*: Paul freely left the Council but later saw some believe in Christ (33-34).

## Not everyone is going to believe in Christ’s resurrection today either.

### Some will—and praise God for some philosophical thinkers who have trusted Christ.

### But people mocked Jesus himself [Matt. 27:28-29]—so some will mock you and me too and invent all kinds of excuses not to believe that Christ arose.

### Others will delay the decision—but you just be patient.

(So what’s today’s text telling us?)

# Conclusion

### How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”? Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way (MI).

### But *how* can you be *interesting*? (Swindoll, 35; Griffith Thomas, 350)

#### Avoid Christian buzzwords—“resurrection,” “deity,” “saved,” and “the faith.”

#### Find common ground—like the common struggle of fear.

#### Proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

#### Ask their opinion of history’s most interesting event—the resurrection of Christ.

### Let’s bow in prayer:

#### Which “free thinker” do *you* know who is actually slave that needs to be set free?

##### Are you willing to share that Jesus is alive with that person?

##### If you will commit yourself to share Christ’s resurrection with that person, please raise your hand now.

#### If you are a “free thinker” today… do you really think you’re free—from guilt, from fear, from aimlessness?

##### God sent Jesus to die for you, but Jesus rose from the dead as proof that he really did pay for your sins.

##### Accept him, will you?

#### Prayer: Tell Him, “God, help me not to be bound by my freedom!”

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

### Paul has just planted two new churches in Macedonia, north of Greece—in Thessalonica and in Berea.

### While he experienced success in those cities, he also had so much opposition that he had to leave both of them—almost like a dog with his tail between his legs.

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

### Acts 1:8 notes that the disciples would be Christ’s witnesses in ever widening circles geographically. But this was true culturally as well—from Jews (who accepted the whole OT) to the half-Jews called Samaritans (who accepted only the first five books of Moses) to those who weren’t Jews at all. These Gentiles who first responded were people like Cornelius, who aligned with Judaism except circumcision and thus were called “God-fearers.” Paul reached these groups of people in the various towns of the first and second missionary journeys.

### But now we see him in Athens talking to his biggest evangelistic challenge yet—the philosophers of his day, many of whom approached life as only a philosophy and didn’t seem to have their feet on the ground. Some might see parallels between these and the secular so-called “free thinkers” in our city.

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

### What did the Greek religion teach at Paul’s time?

### Where does this account fit into Paul’s missionary journeys?

# Questions

### What was Athens known for (16)?

#### “At Athens Christianity met the best thought of the day… It was the most celebrated city in Greece, the home of literature and art, famous in politics and thought. Although under the Romans at this time, Athens was still the intellectual center and the university city of the world, so that its importance can hardly be exaggerated” (Griffith Thomas, 343).

### What idols was Paul looking at that so distressed him (16)?

#### The Parthenon was considered one of the great marvels of ancient days.

#### But Paul wasn’t impressed by the beauty of sculpture and architecture—he saw them from a religious standpoint for what they were as temples, shrines, altars, and idols that insulted God (cf. Rom. 1:22, 23).

### If Paul was distressed over the idols (16), why then did he begin ministering to the Jews and God-fearing Greeks who would not have had a problem with idolatry (17)?

### What did the Epicureans teach (18)?

#### This philosophy following Epicurus, who lived 300 years before Paul, said that happiness or pleasure is the chief goal of man.

#### They said that since there is no afterlife you may as well “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” By Paul’s time Epicureanism had degenerated into a system of thought focussed on sex.

#### This is the party lifestyle depicted after the great discipline needed to compete in the Olympics!

#### One thing we can learn from the Epicureans is how to have fun—I think many “free thinkers” enjoy life more than many Christians do!

### What did the Stoics teach (18)?

#### Zeno, a philosopher also of about 300 BC, rejected Epicureanism because he felt it fostered atheism and self-indulgence.

#### Stoics believed reality is in natural reason—cause and effect pervade all so you may as well adjust yourself for harmony and tranquillity through strong ethical teachings.

#### Stoicism is essentially what we see in Buddhism and Confucianism. And frankly, there’s much good to be said about living in a reasonable manner, adjusting ourselves to be in harmony with others—some “free thinkers” handle stress better than many Christians do!

#### Ultimately, Stoicism leads to materialism. If we focus only on the here and now, we will center our lives on material things.

### What do the philosophers’ comments indicate about their attitude towards Paul (18)?

### What was the Areopagus (19)?

#### This means “Hill of Mars,” named after the trial of the Roman god of war that was supposed to have taken place there.

### Did all the local people and foreigners really only discuss the latest ideas (21)? What about working for a living?

### Why does Paul use this approach of speaking about the unknown god (22-23)? Is he trying to be positive to assume the very best—that they were worshipping the true God after all?

#### “We see Paul facing the highest intellects of his day and speaking with a wonderful combination of faithfulness and tact” (Griffith Thomas, 344).

### If God doesn’t live in temples, then how do we explain his presence in the Jerusalem temple (24)?

### Has God determined how long you will live in your present home (26)?

### How does living at the right spot help us seek God and find Him (27)?

### Are all people the children of God since “we are his offspring” (28)? We are his offspring in creation though not all in redemption.

### Which poets does Paul quote (28)?

#### He first quotes the Greek Stoic poets Epimenides (c. 600 BC) in his *Cretica.*

#### The second quotes is from Aratus (315-240) in his *Phaenomena* and Cleanthes (331-233) in his *Hymn to Zeus* (NIVSB text note on 17:28).

### When did God overlook idolatry (30a)?

### Why didn’t Paul mention Jesus specifically but rather only spoke of judgment and the resurrection in general terms (31)?

### What was so offensive to these philosophers about mention of the resurrection (18, 32)?

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

The proper way to approach the secular thinker is by carefully provoking thought in the resurrection without dumping too much “religion” on him.

The proper way to approach the person steeped in philosophical religion is by carefully provoking thought in the resurrection without dumping too much “religion” on him.

How do we talk with “free thinkers”? Provoke their thinking on the resurrection in an interesting way!

Subject: How do you share Christ with a “free thinker”? Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way!

**Are Free Thinkers Free or Thinkers?**

Since “free thinkers” are really slaves to the latest opinions, how do you share Christ with them?

How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”(since they are really slaves to the latest opinions)?

# Possible Illustrations

### CCC witnessing at “Hay U” when we would ask what major people had.

#### Those in business were very pragmatic in their approach, “What’s the bottom line?” So we’d say, “Hey, it’s this. You’ve offended a holy God and owe Him a lot in the debit column.”

#### The music majors were feeling-oriented people, so I tried to emphasize God’s love and care to them.

#### But I still remember how I felt upon discovering that the person was a philosophy major. “Oh, boy, I’d say. Another philosophy guy. This is going to take a long time and be an uphill battle the whole way!”

### RMG Tours

### Are you also distressed by idols?

### Singapore is now \_\_\_\_\_% so-called “free thinkers”

### Sermon structure in Acts

### Strategies for sharing with the secularized mind

#### ISI Discussion Parties

#### Tioman diving discussion with the Swedish lady and her fiancée’s friend.

#### Sharing with William Ong

### God has called us to reach the intellectuals of our day.

#### John Stott says, “There is an urgent need for more Christian thinkers 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.”

#### Frankly, we could use more creative means here at this church—drama in particular.

### It has been said that if a person doesn’t believe in God, he will believe in nothing.

#### But it’s worse than that. If a person doesn’t believe in God, he will believe in anything.

#### Let’s give this person true freedom by not just being a “thinker” about Jesus, but by being a responder to His love.

### *Ridicule*: Some *rejected* any idea about life after death (32a).

#### Epicureans denied *any* existence after death.

#### Stoics denied any *bodily* existence after death—thinking that only the soul lives on.

### The undecided are actually decided (17:32).

#### We could think that “most people are not so much against God as they are preoccupied.” (Sweeting, *The Acts of God*, 142).

#### But “*not* to decide is to *decide against* Christ” (ibid.).

#### Some will remain slaves to indecision—which itself is a decision!

**Are Free Thinkers Free or Thinkers?**

***Acts 17:16-34***

**Exegetical Outline**

***Exegetical Idea:* The way Paul won some skeptical Athenian philosophers to Christ was by sharing basic Christian truths in an interesting way.**

# I. Issue: The content of Paul’s preaching which the Areopagus requested him to explain was Christ’s resurrection (16-21).

## *Heart*: Idolatry in Athens disturbed Paul (16).

## *Strategy*: Paul followed his normal practice of ministering to the most receptive parts of society first but he also brought his message into the open forum (17).

### Jews and God-fearing Gentiles heard him in the synagogue (17a).

### Shoppers in the marketplace also listened (17b).

## *Content*: Paul’s message about Jesus and His resurrection met with debate by the pagan philosophers (18).

## *Interest*: Nevertheless, these philosophers gave Paul an official opportunity to express his views to the entire Areopagus (19-21).

# II. Strategy: The way Paul provoked thought about Christ’s resurrection to these philosophers was by sharing basic Christian truths in an interesting way (22-31).

## *God*: He provoked interest in the true God by using interesting illustrations that his listeners could identify with (22-28).

### Paul used a contemporary person story to show that the Athenians feared God as one among many (22-23).

### Paul expressed God’s true person (24-28)

#### God reveals himself in nature (24-25).

##### As the world’s Creator and Ruler, he cannot be contained (24).

##### As the Self-Sufficient Giver of Life, he has no needs (25).

#### God reveals himself in man (26-28).

##### Since all men have their source in Him, there is but one God for the whole world (26a).

##### He shows his providence for all people by determining when and where each should live (26b).

##### God’s care should result in man seeking and finding him (27-28).

## *Repentance*: He applied his message, saying that since God is far greater than man is, we should repent from low views of God (29-30).

### In the past (prior to Christ’s coming) God overlooked human ignorance which thought that our creator God was inferior to us like an idol of manmade materials (29-30a).

### In the present (since Christ’s coming) God demands universal repentance (30b).

## *Judgment*: He warned his listeners that Christ would hold them accountable in the future (31a).

## *Resurrection*: He preached Christ’s resurrection as proof that he is also judge (31b).

# III. Results: Paul’s emphasis on Christ’s resurrection brought a mixed response (32-34).

## Some *rejected* any idea about life after death (32a).

## Some were *undecided but open* to hear more about the resurrection in the future (32b).

## Paul willingly left the Council but later saw some believe in Christ (33-34).

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest: It was frustrating in CCC cold turkey sharing with philosophy majors.

### Need: What do you say to “free thinkers”?

### Subject: How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”(since they are really slaves to the latest opinions)?

### Background:

#### Singapore is filled with “free thinkers” as it continues its slide towards secularization and modernization.

#### Athens was the Singapore counterpart of the first century—the most sophisticated and threatening place in the Roman Empire to share Christ.

### Text: Paul initially feels disturbed when entering this city in Acts 17:16.

### Transition: Let’s see some principles from Paul on how to share Christ to the philosophical intellectuals.

# I. Focus on Christ’s resurrection (16-21).

## Issue: The Areopagus asked Paul to explain about Jesus rising from the dead (16-21).

### *Heart*: Idolatry in Athens disturbed Paul (16).

### *Strategy*: Paul followed his normal practice of ministering to the most receptive parts of society first but he also brought his message into the open forum (17).

#### Jews and God-fearing Gentiles heard him in the synagogue (17a).

#### Shoppers in the marketplace also listened (17b).

### *Content*: Paul’s message about Jesus and His resurrection met with debate by the pagan philosophers (18).

### *Interest*: Nevertheless, these philosophers gave Paul an official opportunity to express his views to the entire Areopagus (19-21).

## Do people know you as one who believes that Jesus is alive today?

### Do you talk about Christ as being your friend more than being your philosopher?

### Is your heart disturbed to enter Buddhist and Hindu temples?

### Do you give priority to receptive people?

#### Children

#### Youth

#### Those in crisis

# II. Draw interest in the basics (22-31).

## Content: Paul got these philosophers thinking about Christ’s resurrection by sharing basic Christian truths in an interesting way (22-31).

### *God*: He provoked interest in the true God by using interesting illustrations that his listeners could identify with (22-28).

#### Paul started where they were and acknowledged common ground (22).

#### Paul used the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar to show that the Athenians feared God as one among many gods (23).

#### Paul expressed God’s true person (24-28)

##### God reveals himself in nature (24-25).

###### As the world’s Creator and Ruler, he cannot be contained (24).

###### As the Self-Sufficient Giver of Life, he has no needs (25).

##### God reveals himself in man (26-28).

###### Since all men have their source in Him, there is but one God for the whole world (26a).

###### He shows his providence for all people by determining when and where each should live (26b).

###### God’s care should result in man seeking and finding him (27-28).

### *Repentance*: He applied his message, saying that since God is far greater than man is, we should repent from low views of God (29-30).

#### In the past (prior to Christ’s coming) God overlooked human ignorance which thought that our creator God was inferior to us like an idol of manmade materials (29-30a).

#### In the present (since Christ’s coming) God demands universal repentance (30b).

### *Judgment*: He warned his listeners that Christ would hold them accountable in the future (31a).

### *Resurrection*: He preached Christ’s resurrection as proof that he is also judge (31b).

## We also need to focus “free thinkers” on the basics—especially Christ’s resurrection.

### Talk about who God is—not about irrelevant issues (who their leaders are, matters of minutia, etc.).

### Tell them they will be responsible for who they think God is.

### Lead them up to a decision of what to do with Jesus who’s alive today.

# III. Trust God with the results (32-34).

## Results: Paul’s emphasis on Christ’s resurrection brought a mixed response (32-34).

### *Ridicule*: Some *rejected* any idea about life after death (32a).

#### Epicureans denied *any* existence after death.

#### Stoics denied any *bodily* existence after death—they thought that only the soul lives on.

### *Procrastination*: Some were *undecided but open* to hear more about the resurrection in the future (32b).

### *Acceptance*: Paul willingly left the Council but later saw some believe in Christ (33-34).

## Not everyone is going to believe in Christ’s resurrection today either.

### Some will—and praise God for some high-level thinkers who have trusted Christ.

### But people mocked Jesus himself [Matt. 27:28-29]—so some will mock you and me too and invent all kinds of excuses not to believe that Christ arose.

### Others will delay the decision—you just be patient.

#### “Most people are not so much against God as they are preoccupied” (Sweeting, *The Acts of God*, 142).

#### But “not to decide is to decide against Christ” (ibid.).

#### Some will remain slaves to indecision—which itself is a decision!

# Conclusion

### Since “free thinkers” are really slaves to the latest opinions, how do you share Christ with them? Give them facts!

### How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”? Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way (MI).

### But *how* can you be *interesting*? (Swindoll, 35; Griffith Thomas, 350)

#### Avoid Christian buzzwords—like “resurrection,” “deity,” “saved,” and “the faith.”

#### Find common ground.

#### Proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

#### Ask for their opinion of the most interesting event of history—the resurrection of Christ.

### If you are a “free thinker” today… (gospel)

### Which “free thinker” do you know who is actually enslaved and needs to be set free?

Grace Baptist Church & Emmaus Fellowship Dr. Rick Griffith

8 October 2000 (CC, EF), 15 October 2000 (FEC, SEC) Single Message

NIV 30 Minutes

**Are Free Thinkers Free or Thinkers?**

***Acts 17:16-34***

**Topic:** Evangelism

**Subject:** How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”(i.e. slaves to the latest opinions)?

**Complement:** Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way.

**Purpose:** The listeners will share about Christ’s resurrection to an unbeliever that they know.

**Meditation:** Acts 17:31 “He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

**Reading:** Acts 17:16-34

**You can choose either the short or the long outline with incomplete blanks. (The completed outline is provided only so you know where I’m going with the message.)**

Short Outline with Incomplete Blanks

Introduction

*Issue*: How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”?

**I. Focus on Christ’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (16-21).**

**II. Draw interest in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (22-31).**

**III. Trust God with the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (32-34).**

Conclusion

1. How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”? Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way (Main Idea).

2. But *how* can you be interesting?

Short Outline with Blanks Filled in

Introduction

*Issue*: How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”?

**I. Focus on Christ’s resurrection (16-21).**

**II. Draw interest in the basics (22-31).**

**III. Trust God with the results (32-34).**

Conclusion

1. How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”? Provoke their thinking on Christ’s resurrection in an interesting way (Main Idea).

2. But *how* can you be interesting?

Long Outline with Incomplete Blanks

Introduction

*Issue*: How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”?

**I. Focus on Christ’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (16-21).**

A. The Areopagus asked Paul to explain about Jesus rising from the dead (16-21).

B. Do people know you as one who believes that Jesus is alive today?

**II. Draw interest in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (22-31).**

A. Paul got these philosophers thinking about Christ’s resurrection by sharing basic Christian truths in an interesting way (22-31).

1. *God* (22-28)

2. *Repentance* (29-30)

3. *Judgment* (31a)

4. *Resurrection* (31b)

B. We also need to focus “free thinkers” on the basics—especially Christ’s resurrection.

**III. Trust God with the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (32-34).**

A. Paul’s emphasis on Christ’s resurrection brought a mixed response (32-34).

B. Not everyone is going to believe in Christ’s resurrection today either.

Conclusion

1. How do you share Christ with “free thinkers”? Provoke their thinking on Christ’s **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** in an **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** way (Main Idea).

2. But *how* can you be interesting?