

# Defending the Faith Publicly

By Sam Dallas

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read the comments related to Acts 17:16–21 in the section **It's in the Book**. Then read Romans 1:18–23. In this passage Paul taught on the condition of the heart, the mind of idolaters, and those who “suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18). In addition to suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, Paul also mentioned that such people do not honor God (v. 21). Prepare to share at least five more behaviors mentioned in verses 18–23.

### Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Acts 17:22–31 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare and share an outline of Paul's Areopagus address.

### Assignment Three

Read the comments related to Acts 17:32–34 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share the three types of responses Paul received after his Areopagus address. After listing those responses, write about a time you encountered one of those responses when sharing your faith (if you have had one of those experiences).

## Scripture to Memorize

*“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”* Colossians 4:5

## Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be prepared to wisely defend their faith publicly.

**Sam Dallas** is a doctor of ministry student at Southwestern Seminary. He lives in Burleson, Texas, with his wife Krissi and son Jasper. Sam loves to teach apologetics to anyone, but his passion is training Christian teenagers to share and defend their faith for the advancement of the kingdom of God. He believes that such training also will solidify an authentic faith in teens' lives. You can follow him on Twitter at [@Sam\\_Dallas\\_III](https://twitter.com/Sam_Dallas_III).

## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

The topic of religion comes up every few weeks during lunch at work. Although your boss, Mr. Mays, is fair toward Christians, the same thing cannot be said about your co-worker, Richard. He uses every opportunity to bash Christianity. After a discussion on the influence of religion on contemporary social and political attitudes, Richard comments that separation of church and state should not allow people of faith to have *any* influence on society and politics. Mr. Mays glances your direction just in time to see you roll your eyes, so he asks for your comment. How would you respond?

### Paul on Mars Hill

Read Acts 17:16–34 out loud.

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 16. his spirit was provoked within him.** Paul was disturbed at what he was seeing because many of the monuments were connected to pagan worship.

**Verse 17. in the marketplace every day.** Going to the marketplace would have exposed Paul to many of the Greeks who worshiped pagan gods.

**Verse 18. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.** These were two well-known schools of thought in Athens. Practically speaking, the Epicureans were atheists who believed in no judgment or afterlife and thought human beings should pursue pleasure. The Stoics believed people should seek to live in harmony with the universe by following their conscience and reason.

**Verse 19. brought him to the Areopagus.** This court of justice, which would meet in the open air on the hill, handled matters of religion and ethics. Paul was not on trial in any formal sense, but was invited to explain the message he had been proclaiming in the marketplace.

#### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share at least seven behaviors of the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” Paul mentions in Romans 1:18–23.

#### Discussion Questions

Have you ever had your “spirit provoked” because of ungodliness you see in the culture? What “idols” exist which have (or should have) caused your spirit to be provoked? How do we cultivate a life that causes our spirit to be provoked at the things that provoke God?

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 22. Men of Athens . . . in every way you are very religious.** Even though Paul was troubled when seeing all of the idols (v. 16), he commented on their religious devotion for the purpose of beginning his sermon on common ground.

**Verse 23. To the unknown god.** This altar was built to any gods that might have been overlooked.

**Verse 24. does not live in temples.** Even when Solomon gave his prayer of dedication after

the completion of the first temple, he rightly proclaimed, “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You” (1 Kings 8:27).

**Verse 25. nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything.** Paul’s point was to contrast the Lord to the lesser “gods” worshiped in Athens.

**Verse 26. And He made from one man every nation . . . and the boundaries of their dwelling place.** Since Paul just described the *nature* of God, he now shared the activity and sovereignty of God in creation.

**Verse 28. For we are indeed His offspring.** Paul is quoting the Greek poet Aratus. Paul did not mean “offspring” literally, as Mormons would interpret this verse. Rather, Paul used the quote as a way to proclaim that we are all created by God and made in His image (see Genesis 1:26–27).

**Verse 30. The times of ignorance God overlooked . . . all people everywhere to repent.** Paul’s precise meaning is unclear, but he teaches elsewhere that the penalty for idolatry is truly great (see Romans 1:18–32). Nevertheless, God has not abandoned sinful humanity.

**Verse 31. By a Man whom He has appointed.** Paul had in mind the divine Son of Man, prophesied in Daniel (read Daniel 7:13–14). According to Jesus, God the Father gave Him “authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:27). **by raising Him from the dead.** The ultimate validation of Christ’s claims was His resurrection from the dead.

### Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share his or her outline of Paul’s Areopagus address from Acts 17:22–31.

### Discussion Questions

How does Paul find common ground with his audience? What was the benefit of Paul’s quoting a Greek poet to his listeners?

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 32. Now when they heard of the resurrection . . . , some mocked.** Both the Epicurean and the Stoic listeners rejected the idea of a resurrection from the dead, as is evident by their ridicule toward the teaching. **“We will hear you again about this.”** Fortunately, scoffs were not the only response from the crowd.

**Verse 34. But some men joined him and believed . . . Dionysius the Areopagite.** It is significant that a *member* of the Areopagus became a Christ follower, among others. The fact that Paul had converts shows his labor in Athens was not in vain.

### Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on the three types of responses Paul receives after his Areopagus address, found in Acts 17:32–34.

### Discussion Questions

Have you ever encountered any (or all) of the responses Paul received after his Areopagus address? What was that like?

### **On Your Own**

In the space below, list a few things you learned from Paul's presentation of the gospel in his Areopagus address. Based on what you learned, write advice to disciples who want to proclaim and defend their faith publicly. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

### **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** at the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

### **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

### **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

### **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

### **Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## At Home: Nail It Down

When defending your faith publicly, take Jesus' words to heart: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). We must hold on to wisdom, as well as innocence. The disciple should "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) but not pick fights over religion or arguments about faith with others.

Notice how Paul engaged the Athenians in Acts 17. Luke tells us that Paul's "spirit was provoked within him" (v. 16) when seeing all of the idols in Athens. Elsewhere, Paul called such sacrifices to idols as actually being "sacrifices to demons and not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20). Clearly, Paul thought the religious activities of these Athenians to be greatly offensive to God, and this offended Paul!

Nevertheless, Paul did not attack the Athenians for their pagan worship. Instead, he shared with them in the Areopagus by recognizing their religious activity and then using one of their own erected idols (the idol to the "unknown god") as a way to bridge to their beliefs. He even quoted a Greek poet as a way to further bridge that gap.

When Paul spoke to the Jews, he would immediately talk about Christ and the resurrection. In this case Paul was talking to people who didn't even have the right view of God (unlike the Jews), so he engaged them by *first* talking about God's nature and activity. *Then* Paul shared the gospel and the resurrection with them.

Paul encountered three responses to his Areopagus address:

- Some mocked (Acts 17:32).
- Some wanted more information (Acts 17:32).
- Some believed (Acts 17:34).

Disciples who share and defend their faith publicly should expect all three types of responses from their peers, but you must follow Paul's command: "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time" (Colossians 4:5).

### Follow up Question

*How can you "contend . . . for the faith" (Jude 3) publicly while being both wise and innocent as Jesus has commanded (Matthew 10:16)?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.