

Paul in Athens

Acts 17:16-34

Paul in Athens Introduction

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- In the last two weeks, we have looked at two sermons from the Apostle Peter.
- They were given in Jerusalem and Caesarea, along the coast.
- The context was Jewish even if not all the people were.

Paul in Athens Introduction

- Today we will follow Paul to the city of Athens.
- He will speak to the Greeks in the center of Greek language, culture and learning.

Paul in Athens Introduction

- His listeners were very well-educated, but were not exposed to the Bible.
- They did not know the Jewish Scriptures or God.
- We will see an example of how Paul addresses this crowd.

Paul in Athens Acts 17 Outline

1. His Ministry 17:16-21
2. His Message 17:22-31
3. His Impact 17:32-34

His Ministry 17:16-21



His Ministry 17:16-21

- 17:16 Unimpressed by the greatness of the city, Paul's "spirit was provoked within him."
- Athens was "full of idols" – a unique expression in Greek.
- "Smothered" or "swamped" with idols – a "forest" of idols.

His Ministry 17:16-21

- 17:16 Non-Christian ancient writers said,
- *Athens is one great altar, one great sacrifice.*
- *It is easier to find a god there than a man.*

His Ministry 17:16-21

- **17:18** The **Stoics** (founded by Zeno of Citium ~300 B.C.) considered passionate emotions to be the result of errors in judgment.
- A *sage*, with "moral and intellectual perfection," would not have such emotions.
- They acknowledged God, but in a *pantheistic* way.

His Ministry 17:16-21

- **17:18** **Epicureans** (Epicurus, also ~300 B.C.) believed that the greatest good was to seek modest pleasures – no concern for gods.
- Their goal was to attain a state of *tranquility*, through knowledge of the world and the limits of our desires.

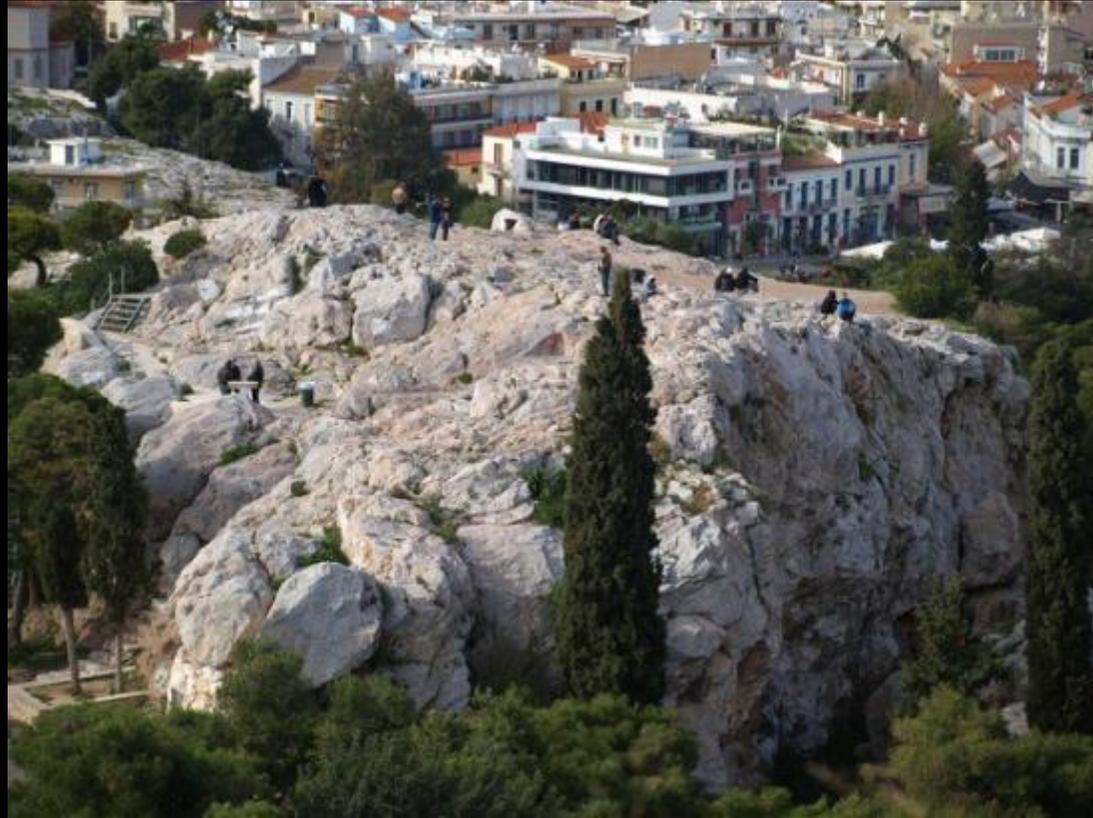
His Ministry 17:16-21

- **17:21** Athens was the ancient world's intellectual center, where fresh ideas were always welcome for discussion.
- Therefore, "all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new."
- This attitude gave Paul an open door for the gospel.

His Message 17:22-31



His Message 17:22-31



His Message 17:22-31

- 17:22-23 The Unknown God The Athenians admitted that there might be gods they did not know.
- Paul uses this idea to build a bridge to his hearers.
- He will now make five points to them about the real God.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #1:

- 17:24 God made the world [*kosmos*] and everything in it.
He is the Creator of the universe.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #2:

- 17:25 God is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything ...
- He doesn't need a temple, an altar or anything from us.
- Rather, we depend upon him for life itself.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #3:

- **17:26** God 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.
- He is, ultimately, the Ruler of all nations.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #4:

- 17:28 In him we live ... We are his offspring.
- We are made in his image. Thus, it makes no sense to worship images of him.
- Images are less than human. God is more.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #4 Side note:

- 17:28 In him we live ... We are his offspring.
- Paul quotes two separate pagan poets here. The crowd on Mars Hill would appreciate that.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #4 Side note:

- Also see 1 Cor. 15:33 “Bad company corrupts good morals.”
- Titus 1:12 “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”
- Paul quoted Greek authors to the Greeks.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #5:

- **17:30-31** God has overlooked our ignorance – for now – but will one day judge the world through Jesus.
- The Athenians admitted there was a God they did not know.
- One day the true God will hold them accountable if they do not turn to him.

His Message 17:22-31

Point #5:

- **17:30-31** God has overlooked our ignorance – for now – but will one day judge the world through Jesus.
- We now believe only some people deserve judgment – murderers, corrupt leaders, etc.

His Impact 17:32-34

His Impact 17:32-34

- 17:32-34 The results of the messages in Acts lead to almost predictable results – the kind of results we still see.
 1. Some mocked
 2. Some wanted to hear more.
 3. Other believed and joined Paul.

What Paul in Athens can teach us

What Paul in Athens can teach us

- He saw the idolatry of the city.
- Admittedly, it was obvious.
- But today idolatry is no less common.
- We just have to train our eyes to see it – perhaps work, money, sex, food, certain people as in family or friends – anything that gets between us and God.

What Paul in Athens can teach us

- He was deeply moved by that idolatry.
- We may see it, but are we deeply moved?
- If not, why not?
- Perhaps because we have too many idols of our own.
- Ephesians 5:5 Covetousness is idolatry.

What Paul in Athens can teach us

- His spirit provoked him – not to condemn and criticize – but to build bridges and engage in reasonable dialogue.
- He reasoned in the synagogue and marketplace. (v.17)
- He conversed with the various philosophers. (v.18)
- We need to be careful not to alienate the very people we are sent to reach.

What Paul in Athens can teach us

- After establishing credibility, he did not shrink back from confrontation – even to the point of proclaiming judgment.
- Love has to do more than affirm everything and everyone.
- Love demands we pull the masks off of false gods.

What Paul in Athens can teach us

- His results were mixed. Ours will be too.
 1. Some mocked
 2. Some wanted to hear more.
 3. Other believed and joined Paul.

What Paul in Athens can teach us

- Things to pray about:

1. Insight to see the idols that surround us.
2. Passion that is tied to the heart of God.
3. Compassion to view others as objects of God's love.
4. Boldness to share the equal truth of God's judgment.
5. For God to work in the hearts of those around us.