



A Witness in Spiritual Darkness

Acts 17:16-34

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While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply disturbed in his spirit to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, and in the marketplace with those he met each day. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" while others said, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was proclaiming the good news of Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 17:16-34, cont.

So they took Paul and brought him to the Areopagus, where they asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you are bringing some strange notions to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” Now all the Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing more than hearing and articulating new ideas. Then Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious.

Acts 17:16-34, cont.

For as I walked around and examined your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore what you worship as something unknown, I now proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands. Nor is He served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, to inhabit the whole earth; and He determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands.

Acts 17:16-34, cont.

God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. 'For in Him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.' Therefore, being offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by man's skill and imagination. Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all people everywhere to repent.

Acts 17:16-34, cont.

For 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.” When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to mock him, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this topic.” At that, Paul left the Areopagus. But some joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others who were with them.

Today's World

- **Atheism – there is no God**
- **Agnosticism – I don't know if there is a God**
- **Practical Atheism – I live my life as if there is no God**
- **Deism – I “believe” in a God who is far, distant, aloof, uncaring**
- **Hedonism – The best thing to do is to pursue one's own pleasure**
- **Materialism – The universe is fundamentally material**
- **Christianity stands opposed to all of these**

Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers

- The Epicurean Philosophy argued that pleasure was the chief good in life. Founded by Epicurus ca. 200 B.C., it held the best thing a man can do in life is to pursue happiness, and was a form of hedonism.
- Atheistic: “I was not, I was, I am not, I care not.”
- Declaration of Independence of the United States that says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Stoic Philosophers

- **Founded by Zeno, named for the *Stoa Poikile* of “Painted Porch,” where he met with his followers.**
- **The Stoic believed that happiness was achieved by not allowing being dominated by a desire for pleasure or a fear of pain. Rather the individual must accept life as it is, his place in the world, and to treat others fairly and justly.**
- **“Virtue is the only good”**
- **Yet it also was atheistic, and sought to live life without God.**

Both were Atheistic

- Malcomb Forbes, “He who dies with the most toys wins.”
- And the Stoic philosophy is characterized by the lines of the character Sidney Carton, in Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, who has traded places with the character Charles Darnay and gone to the guillotine for his friend, “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”
- Both felt morally superior to others.
- Paul begins with God in addressing them.

1. A Burdened Preacher Is Sent

- There is a difference between a holy and burdened spirit and self-righteousness
- When God begins to move in this world, He begins with giving His people a burden for the sin of the world.
- Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra
- Christ wept over Jerusalem
- Are we weeping today?

2. The Personal God Is Proclaimed

- “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands. Nor is He served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, to inhabit the whole earth; and He determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands.” (Acts 17:24-26)**

2. The Personal God Is Proclaimed

- “God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. ‘For in Him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’ Therefore, being offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by man’s skill and imagination.” (Acts 17:27-29)

3. The Critical Moment Is Announced

- **“Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all people everywhere to repent. For 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.” (Acts 17:30-31)**
- **When the gospel is proclaimed then there is a divinely announced urgency to believe in Christ.**

The Resurrection

- **“Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:4).**
- **Alexander Maclaren wrote: “His Resurrection was God’s setting the seal of His approval and acceptance on Christ’s work; His endorsement of Christ’s claims to special relations with Him; His affirmation of Christ’s sinlessness.”**