

Acts 17:16-34 The Gospel To The Ignorant

I. The Gospel Comes To Athens (16-21)

A. Paul's Zealous Heart For the Gospel (16-17)

1. Paul is distressed by the number of idols in Athens (16)
 - a. Paul was not impressed with the amazing architecture
 - b. Paul was not awed with the rich academic history of the region
 - i. Athens had lost most of it's greatness by Paul's day but was probably one of the oldest cities Paul visited
 - ii. Athens was still a symbol of wisdom and philosophical thought
 - c. Paul was distressed (spirit was stirred) because the people of Athens were steeped in idolatry
 - i. Early writers estimate as many as 73,000 statues in Rhodes and Athens
2. Paul Argues in both the synagogue and the agora (17)
 - a. Paul continues his pattern of teaching and evangelizing in the synagogue
 - b. Paul also preaches in the marketplace of Athens
 - i. This is the same place Socrates taught 500 years earlier
 - ii. The Agora was the center of commerce and dialogue in Greek city-states
 - It was where merchants sold their wares
 - It was where people hung out and exchanged ideas
 - It was the "starbucks" of the ancient world
 - iii. Paul took his message to where the people were
 - iv. Paul is said to "argue" (i.e. dispute) with both Jew and Gentile in the Agora
 - He was interacting with their questions and comments
 - They were interacting with his preaching
 - v. Paul disputed them "daily" (i.e. day by day)

B. Paul's Gospel Makes Waves in Athens (18-21)

1. Paul's message is Strange to the Athenians (18)
 - a. The Epicureans and The Stoics
 - i. The Epicureans – They didn't believe in the god myths
 - Believed in gods but they are uninterested in men's affairs – "Deism"
 - Believed life is about pleasure (absence of pain or disturbance)

- ii. The Stoics – The most popular Greek philosophy in Paul’s day
 - Believe god is present in the material world as an active principle (Panthemism)
 - Believe god is physically present in all matter as the Logos
 - Believe life is about virtue. To live virtuously is to live in agreement with reason (the logos) is the highest good
 - Believe happiness is found by being self-sufficient and detached from emotionalism
 - b. Paul is Called a Babbler
 - i. The word here means “seed picker”
 - It was used of birds who gather
 - Paul is being accused of cobbling together teachings
 - ii. Paul is seen as someone who doesn’t understand what he is saying
 - c. Paul is thought to be preaching strange (foreign gods)
 - i. Paul was actually preaching the Resurrection of Jesus
 - ii. They apparently thought Paul was introducing new gods into their worldview
 - They may have thought “Anastasis” (the word meaning resurrection) was Paul introducing a new god with that name
- 2. Paul is taken to the Areopagus
 - a. The Areopagus – literally means the rock of Ares (god of war)
 - i. The term was changed in some Latin translations to reflect the Roman god of war (i.e. Mars hill)
 - ii. The Areopagus was once the central political and governmental meeting place in Athens
 - By Paul’s day, under Roman rule, the Areopagus functioned as a premier area where expert philosophers and thinkers taught and expressed ideas
 - Paul is not on trial here in a legal sense, he is being examined as to the validity of his philosophical worldview
 - iii. In Athens, Philosophy wasn’t just a way of thinking. It was an entire worldview that included reality, nature, and the search for wisdom (i.e. how to live)

- iv. If Paul was teaching about new gods, he needed to be examined by the experts
 - b. They desired to know more of Paul's teaching
- II. Paul's Sermon To the Athenians (22-31)
 - A. Paul Makes the True God Known To Them (22-29)
 - 1. Paul will proclaim the God They Don't Know (22-23)
 - a. Paul addresses their religious zeal (22)
 - i. He begins by saying he sees that they are very religious (i.e. superstitious)
 - ii. This isn't necessarily an insult or a compliment, just a statement of fact
 - b. Paul references their idol to the unknown god (23a)
 - i. Paul have seen their "devotions" – this literally says, "your objects of worship" – he is talking about all their idols
 - ii. Paul has even seen an idol built for an unknown god
 - The Greek gods each had their own sphere of influence. If you were going on a sea journey, you sacrificed to Poseidon. If you were going to war you sacrificed to Ares.
 - The Greeks realized that in their vast number of gods, they might have missed one who would be angry with them
 - c. Paul proclaims the god they know they don't know (23b)
 - i. Paul uses this to show the Athenians that there is a god that they themselves agree they don't know
 - ii. Paul will introduce them to this God
 - Paul is not just introducing another god to the multitude of gods they already worship
 - Paul's sermon will distinguish the one true God from all the false gods
 - Paul is rejecting the claim that he is introducing a strange or foreign god, He is introducing a God already over Athens, whom the Athenians understand they don't know
 - 2. The One True God is All Powerful (24-25)
 - a. The God of Creation Doesn't Live in Temples (24)
 - i. God made the world and everything in it
 - He is not just a god over a certain area
 - He is the creator who created all things

- ii. God is the Lord of heaven and earth
 - There is nothing he is not Lord over
 - This God is Sovereign over creation
 - iii. God does not dwell in temples made with hands
 - He is not confined by man's buildings
 - The true God isn't bound by man's thoughts and religious buildings
 - b. The One True God is Self Sufficient (25)
 - i. God does not need our worship or service
 - The Greeks brought sacrifices and service to please the gods
 - Why did ancient Israelites bring sacrifices?
 - ii. God is the one who gives man everything
 - God is sustaining man's very life
 - God is sustaining man's every breath
 - God has given all things
- 3. The One True God is Sovereign Over All Men (26)
 - a. God has created the men of every nation
 - i. Nations do not have their own native gods
 - ii. The one God has created all men, all nations
 - iii. There is only one race – the human race
 - b. God determined men's times and places
 - i. God has sovereignly determined the times in which men will live
 - ii. God has sovereignly determined the places in which men will live
 - iii. There is no room for pride regarding who men are or where they live – all is a grace from God
 - c. God is in Complete Control
- 4. The One True God is Imminent (27-28)
 - a. Men were created to seek God
 - i. God created mankind for relationship with him
 - ii. The Greeks here demonstrate that they are seeking God by worshiping all these things
 - iii. Man is created to worship – Man will worship anything and everything
 - Man has enough revelation in creation to condemn him – God has revealed himself in creation
 - Man needs God's revelation in His word to be saved – otherwise he is simply “feeling haply” after God
 - b. God is close to all men
 - i. God is not some being unengaged with humanity like the Epicureans believe

- ii. God has revealed himself and is intimately involved in every area of life
 - iii. God is omnipresent
 - c. God is sustaining all men (28)
 - i. It is through God that all men live
 - ii. It is through God that all men move
 - iii. It is through God that all men exist
- 5. The One True God is Transcendent (29)
 - a. Men are truly God's offspring
 - i. Mankind is created in God's image
 - ii. In this sense man is God's offspring
 - iii. Paul is using the Greek poets statement to show forth the biblical truth of creation
 - b. God cannot be housed in any man-made image
 - i. God is above the creation so man cannot create an image from the creation and worship it
 - ii. God is not worshiped by serving man made objects
 - iii. God will not be housed in any image
- B. Paul Presents God's Demands on Mankind (30-31)
 - 1. God Commands All Men To Repent (30)
 - a. The Athenians are "ignorant" of this unknown God
 - b. God allowed this ignorance to continue until the Messiah came forth
 - c. Now all men everywhere are commanded to repent and turn to Christ
 - 2. God Will Judge The World By Jesus (31)
 - a. Judgment is coming for all men
 - b. Judgment will be based upon the response to Christ's Lordship
 - 3. God Proved His Message By The Resurrection
- III. The Response To The Gospel (32-34)
 - A. Some Mocked Paul
 - B. Some Wanted to hear more
 - C. Some Joined Paul and Believed