

PAUL ON MARS' HILL

Text: Acts 17:15-34

The great Apostle's mission to Athens is confirmation that God loves the world. Paul's visit to this epicenter of ancient European civilization is a great reminder that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is offered to all. Let's go with Paul as we observe the collision of man's philosophy and God's truth. It will serve us well to remember the words of the Lord Jesus who said in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

I. The disputation of the Apostle

Acts 17:15-22

A. The Bothered Spirit of God's Man

Acts 17:16. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is liberating and "nulli secundus" (second to none). Christ died, was buried and rose from the grave. No other religion ever had a founder who did this! To place Christianity in competition with the ludicrous and ridiculous mythology of, not only fallen man, but even more so, man's immoral fallen gods, is beyond reason. Not only were the ancient Greeks captivated by this idolatry, they were enslaved to it, as these words reveal: "...when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (Acts 17:16c). Thieliicke has said, "Whenever God the Creator is deposed as the absolute and Sovereign Lord of the world and our life, the 'gods' take over."

B. The Burden for the Brethren

Acts 17:17. We see in this verse another verse that comes to mind: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" Romans 1:16. The patience that Paul has toward his natural kinsmen is touching and understandable when we read Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

C. The Barriers That Block the Truth

Acts 17:18. "The Epicureans were disciples of Epicurus, 341-270 B.C., who abandoned as hopeless the search by reason for pure truth, seeking instead, true pleasure through experience. The Stoics were disciples of Zeno, 336-264 B.C. This philosophy was founded on human self-sufficiency, inculcated stern self-repression

and solidarity of race. Paul's sermon (Acts 17:22-32) contains a most remarkable refutation of the specific views of both of these schools, which were extremely widespread in the apostolic world." (Scofield, 1967 edition, page 1190). The Stoic said "Endure Life" while the Epicureans said "Enjoy Life!" Newspaper columnist Franklin P. Adams once defined philosophy as "unintelligible answers to insoluble problems."

II. The Examination at Areopagus

Acts 17:19-21.

A. The Curious

Acts 17:19. The Greeks were merely following the teaching of Aristotle who called philosophy the science which considers truth. The wise man Solomon said centuries before in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

B. The Skeptics

Acts 17:20. Areopagus was the highest court of Athens, which met at Mars' Hill, just west of the Acropolis. These skeptics wanted to put the Gospel under the proverbial microscopic examination. This is fine with Paul because he knew the Gospel to be far more defensible than any philosophy the Greeks were embracing.

C. The Hungry

Acts 17:21. In the search for some new thing, the deep-seated hunger of a civilization that sought, but found no answers, is evident. This was a people steeped in philosophy. Philosophy is from the Greek word, "philosophia" from philo = friend/lover + sophia = wisdom. It is literally a love of wisdom and came to mean "tenets of heathen Gentile philosophers." A knowledgeable source reveals it is "human understanding or wisdom and, by implication, in contrast with divinely revealed knowledge." G Campbell Morgan said, "Philosophy has been a quest, and never a conquest." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones may have said it best, "If a philosophy of life cannot help me to die, then in a sense it cannot help me to live." One has remarked that a philosopher was like "a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat which is not there." A more dignified definition of philosophy is "man's attempt to befuddle himself scientifically!" Even Shakespeare entered the discussion: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (Hamlet, I, 5). Solomon, in exasperation, said Ecclesiastes 1:13, "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith."

III. The Proclamation to the Athenians

Acts 17:22-31. In light of what has already been addressed, it is only appropriate that we should quote I Corinthians 1:21: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” I see four points to Paul’s sermon:

A. Consider the Transcendent God

Acts 17:22-23. As we see through Paul’s eye the heathen groping in the dark for the True and Living God, we hear the words of Jesus in Mark 12:34b: “...Thou art not far from the kingdom of God....”

B. Consider God’s Creation

Acts 17:24-29a. The phrase Paul is seizing upon is “we are the offspring of God.” This separates us from the animal kingdom. It appears that Paul is leading up to the fact that “...God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

C. Consider the Creator

Acts 17:29b, c, 24. Paul is moving his listeners to see God is omnipotent; He cannot be created. He is the Creator and He cannot be confined to man’s designated geography. The gods of the Greeks and Romans are too small.

D. Consider the Impending Judgment

Acts 17:30, 31. When the Bible says in Acts 17:30a, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at...” He is not saying He ever took sin lightly. This verse is saying that God has been longsuffering with us, but He is soon to move now and the day has been appointed (Acts 17:31) in which all the world will be judged and the judge is revealed as the Lord Jesus!

Conclusion: The response to the invitation:

Acts 16:32, 33. People respond today, the same way they responded on Mars’ Hill.

1. Rejection: “...some mocked...” (Acts 17:32b)
2. Procrastination: “...We will hear thee again...” (Acts 17:32c)
3. Salvation: “Howbeit certain men...believed...” (Acts 17:34a)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.