

Acts 17:16-21

Full of Idols

Proposition: *In a world full of idolatry, the Gospel alone answers it.*

I. Athens: A City-Altar to Idols. (vv. 16)

- a. Its rampant idolatry shows *imagination's tendency to create idols*.
 - i. Rooted in willful ignorance of God. (v. 23, 30)
 - ii. Fruited in vicious curiosity for all things spiritual. (vv. 20, 21)
- b. Its intellectual culture shows *reason's conceit to defend idolatry*.
 - i. Rooted in indomitable religiosity. (v. 22)
 - ii. Fruited in shrewd philosophical systems. (v. 18)

II. The Aeropagus: A Council of Vain Curiosities. (vv. 19-21)

- a. Its existence shows *idolatry's intense grip on the heart*.
 - i. Employed to curate novelty for public pleasure. (v. 21)
 - ii. Furnished with experts esteemed locally and abroad. (vv. 19, 32)
- b. Its vain curiosity shows *institutional idolatry at its most dangerous*.
 - i. Celebrating wisdom but enslaved to folly. (vv. 24-29)
 - ii. Multiplying idols but neglecting the Image of God. (vv. 16, 30)

III. Paul: An Apostle of Jesus Christ to Idolaters. (vv. 16-18)

- a. His reaction to idolatry shows *imagination captive to Christ*.
 - i. Provoked by idols rather than enticed. (v. 16)
 - ii. Zealous for Christ rather than religiosity. (v. 17)
- b. His message against idolatry shows *reason enlivened by faith*.
 - i. Focusing on Jesus as the image of the unknown God. (v. 18)
 - ii. Emphasizing Jesus' resurrection as the key to knowing God. (v. 18)

IV. Two Key Applications for Athens Today.

- a. First, *resist the Athenian urge to reimagine God*.
 - i. One, because *idolatry is exceedingly wicked*. The Spirit of the Living God is greatly provoked by idolatry, as also we who are captive to Christ and made alive by faith should be. **Therefore, be ever careful not to provoke God** by cherishing private idols in your heart, however beautiful. Be appalled by them and preach the Word of Truth to your heart.
 - ii. Two, because *idolatry is all too easy*. Athens is the incarnation of the human heart, hellbent on the creation, establishment, and defense of ceaseless idolatry. **Therefore, be ever watchful of novel ideas**, especially those which we find the most interesting and captivating. Cleave to Christ. "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God" (Ps. 62:11).
- b. Second, *cultivate a Pauline zeal for the Gospel*.

- i. One, because *mere curiosity begets idolatry*. Treating Jesus as an intellectual exercise is exceedingly dangerous and reveals deep-rooted, malevolent idolatry. **Therefore, be ever zealous to cultivate heart-affection for Jesus** and not intellectual assent, lest you merely indulge him with a hearing but dismiss his serious call to repentance.
- ii. Two, because *the Gospel answers idolatry*. The proclamation of the Gospel to idolaters must *never compromise on but rather climax in the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. His resurrection is all our hope. **Therefore, be ever courageous** to declare the simple and unimaginable Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ, the revealed and resurrected image of Almighty God.