

A SERMON FOR IGNORANT ACADEMICS - Acts 17:22-23

032722A

Introduction

1. Church's relationship to "the Academy." Love truth - [Lk 10:27; 2Th 2:10].
2. Need wisdom, discernment - moral evaluation of "knowledge." [Phil 1:9-11]
3. A17:22-34. Paul, most "educated" of apostles, before intellectual elite.

1st: A Mistaken Contemporary Interpretation

1. Religious pluralism: Jew, Xn, Muslim - Abraham's children: Pope Francis .<https://catholicoutlook.org/pope-francis-message-to-representatives-of-the-abrahamic-religions-at-ur-iraq/>
2. Rom 1. Natural revelation - natural religion w/ "commendable" aspects
3. A17 is used by "Insider Movements." Worship true God w/o knowing it. But separating worship from salvation is impossible.
4. Projection of contemporary aversion to "confrontation" onto Paul in A17. Non-confrontational but *knowledge of truth* - [2T 2:23-26]
5. Atmosphere is tense in Areopagus. Recall inclusio: v18 & 31-32

2nd: Idolatry and the True God

1. v22 *stood in midst of Areopagus & said*: in court: serious solemn assertion
2. Paul indicts idolatry [IIndc]. 2 assumptions: 1] ignorance of God; 2] fear of wrath of gods - rituals to placate deities: ignorance & fear of judgment [R1].
3. v22 *very religious*: ambiguous. KJV *superstitious*: talisman - fig leaf. Protection from God's wrath.

4. In v23 - he delineates their worship & their words: *you worship ignorance - an unknown God*. Grk root: "agnostic" - w/o knowledge - ironic.

- i. *altar* - used only here in NT: shrine. In OT: *high place*: empty pedestal?
- ii. *worship* [2x in v23] acts of pious homage - w/o meaning - *ignorant*

5. *this I proclaim to you* - what is *this*? NASB *what you worship*: many say *this* = the unknown God. I submit: *this* refers to their *worship* w/ includes *unknown God* - that you worship in ignorance = this I proclaim to you.

- i. Rom 1. Paul profiles the true God - their idolatry is intentional distortion [false imaging] of God - Rom 1:25; lying to themselves about God.
- ii. Indicted for their ignorance. v22 *unknown God*; 29 *we ought not to think* [thinking is an ethical, moral activity]; v30 *times of ignorance*
- iii. v24 the Creator
- iv. v25 the Giver of life
- v. v26 the God who made all men everywhere [Athens saw selves as "autochthonous" = self + soil - racial & geographical superiority]
- vi. v27-28 why grope when God is near [poets indict, not endorse]
- vii. v29 how can Giver of life be like a dead stone, built by men?
- viii. v30f = declaration of God's gospel - cut short at *resurrection*

Applic #1: We Reject The Notion That All Religions Are The Same

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1. Paul is not validating Athenian idolatry as some variation of biblical religion
2. Athenian idolatry is false: *ought not!*

Applic #2: Compassion for Pagans Who are in the Darkness of Ignorance & Fear

1. Adam's fig leaf is relevant: false religion is an elaborate fig leaf: protect from divine wrath.
2. Paganism is result of the knowledge of God's existence but refusal to honor Him as God & exchange Him for creature/idol - protection.
3. Mat 9:36-38. Let's be like Jesus; be like Isaiah 6:8 *Send me*.