

“16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. 17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. 18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. 19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, *is*? 20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) 22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, *Ye* men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. 29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. 30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*. 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which *was* Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” (Acts 17:16-34)

Introduction

Though Paul, whithersoever he came, did stoutly execute that function of teaching which he knew was enjoined with him, yet Luke showeth that he was more incensed and moved at Athens, because he saw idolatry reign more there than in any other place for the most part. The whole world was then full of idols; the pure worship of God could be found nowhere; and there were everywhere innumerable monsters of superstitions, but Satan had made the city of Athens more mad than any other city, so that the people thereof were carried headlong

with greater madness unto their wickedness and perverse rites.

And this example is worth the noting, that the city, which was the mansion-house of wisdom, the fountain of all arts, the mother of humanity, did exceed all others in blindness and madness. We know with what commandments witty and learned men did set forth the same, and she had conceived so great good liking of herself that she counted those rude **F1128** whom she had not polished. But the Holy Ghost condemning the whole world of ignorance and blockishness, saith that those masters of liberal sciences were bewitched with an unwonted madness.

Whence we gather what man’s wit can do in matters which concern God. Neither need we doubt of this, but that the Lord suffered the men of Athens to fall into extreme madness, that all the world might learn by them, and that they might teach all ages that the foresight and wit of man’s mind being help with learning and instruction, doth altogether dote, and is mere foolishness when it cometh to the kingdom of God. They had undoubtedly their cloaks and colors, wherewith they did excuse their worshippings, how preposterous and corrupt soever they were.

And yet, notwithstanding, it is certain that they did not only deceive men with childish and frivolous toys, but that they themselves were deluded shamefully with gross and filthy jugglings, as if they were deprived of common sense, and were altogether blockish and brutish. And as we learn what manner [of] religion proceedeth from man’s understanding, and that man’s wisdom is nothing else but a shop of all errors, so we may know that the men of Athens, being drunk with their own pride, did err more filthily than the rest. The antiquity, the pleasantness, and beauty of the city, did puff them up, so that they did boast that the gods came thence.

Therefore, forasmuch as they did pull down God from heaven, that they might make him an inhabitant of their city, it was meet that they should be thrust down into the nethermost hell.

Howsoever it be, the vanity of man’s wisdom is here marked with eternal infamy by the Spirit of God; because, where it was principally resident, there was the darkness more thick. Idolatry did reign most of all there; and Satan carried men’s minds to and fro more freely by his mocks and juggling. –Calvin on Acts 17:18

I. The Mental Darkness of Unbelief. Vs 18-22.

- A. Do not be deceived. Idolatry is a darkening of the mind. Romans 1:18-31 The apostle Paul seemed like a “babbling” to them. Babbling: 1) picking up seed 1a) of birds, esp. of

the crow or daw that picks up grain in fields 2) metaph. 2a) lounging about the market place and picking up a substance by whatever may chance to fall from the loads of merchandise 2b) hence, beggarly, abject, vile, (a parasite) 2c) getting a living by flattery and buffoonery 2d) an empty talker, babblers.

- B. This is a comfort to me. If they said this about Paul, and said Jesus was possessed with a devil, what will they say about me? What will they say about you. I am supposed to tell the message; not make it acceptable to fools.
- C. Idolatry always brings the same result because it brings the wrath of God; and men are blinded by their sins and rebellion.
- D. What is idolatry: See HC. 94, 95, 96, 97, 98

II. The Fear and Slavery of Ignorant Worship. Vs. 23-27

- A. The Fear of Ignorant worship; fear is the opposite of faith. They feared that they had omitted some God who would be angry with them.
 - 1. Works—which always reduces to ceremony, for we do ceremonies rather than give ourselves up to God. God wants your heart; your love; your spiritual worship. And this can never be offered out of fear and dread. Fear is slavish and cowering before God and cannot work righteousness. The man with one talent feared, and hid his talent in the ground; he was a hypocrite and wicked, the Lord said.
 - 2. God cannot be served with men’s hands; he must be served with our hearts and souls.
 - a. Romans 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.
 - b. Heb. 2: 14 ¶ Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.
- B. Faith—Begins with receiving the Gospel, that Christ died for my sins, and therefore I belong to Christ. This works love in my heart and I am a son of God, not a slave.
 - 1. HC 1. I belong to Jesus Christ. You know this by faith. This is your only comfort in life and death. You do not worship idols for your life is hid with Christ in God.
 - 2. Read the catechism!!! Teach it to your kids. First of all: live it, and then teach it. And shout it from the rooftops: not because it is the catechism, but because it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. He is not far from any of us: human senses are figures of the senses of the soul. Look and live; hear and your soul shall live; taste and see that the Lord is God. Receive the sweet aroma of the Gospel; here: “feel after him” grope as in the darkness, but know you are in darkness and seek the light.

4. Is. 55: 6 ¶ Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

III. The Freedom of God’s Offspring. Vs. 28-34

- A. We are the created sons of God; that is, we are in his image. That is why we can seek him. Being created isn’t salvation; there must a new creation: a moral and spiritual one.
- B. Our worship must therefore be a spiritual one: vs. 29-31 The foundations of this worship:
 1. Vs. 29 Change your thinking. Vs. 29. This is the work of the Spirit of God: 2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Power to break the bondage of superstition; love to fulfill the commandments of God; sound mind to think clearly according to reality and the truth.
 2. Vs. 30 Repentance: turn around. You are going the wrong way and are just entangling yourself more and more into bondage, the bondage of idolatry and foolishness. Ezek. 33:10 Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?
 3. Vs. 31 He has no pleasure in the destruction of His creation, but that we turn from our wickedness and live. He has appointed a day in which he will judge the world through Jesus Christ, whom he raised from the dead. You must make your peace with the judge, the Lord Jesus, who died for you to take your sins away.

Application

1. Salvation is only in Jesus Christ John 3:13 “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
2. Faith is the key: Romans 10:8-17
 - a. It is near you: in Him we live and move and have our being.
 - b. With the heart we believe unto righteousness: repentance and faith.

- c. We call upon the name of the Lord. Figure: call, just as the blind man called out to Jesus for mercy, we call out to the Lord from our hearts for mercy and grace.
- d. This faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. If you believe you will not be ashamed.

AMEN AND AMEN. God bless you.