



1  **CONFRONTING THE CULTURE**


Acts 17:16-34

2  **Act 17:16-34**


⦿ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears.

3  **Act 17:16-34**


⦿ We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.'

4  **Act 17:16-34**

⦿ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

5  **Act 17:16-34**

⦿ Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

6  **Act 17:16-34**

⦿ Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

7  **The setting**

- ⦿ Paul is in the city of Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy, who had remained at Berea to continue to instruct the new Berean Christians.
- ⦿ But while he is there, Paul finds he cannot sit still for long: the city is full of idolatry.

8  **The Parthenon**

- ⦿ Athens was home to the Parthenon, the primary temple for the worship of Athena, the patron deity of the city.
- ⦿ Athena was the goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice,

just warfare, mathematics, strength, strategy, the arts, crafts, skill, and heroic endeavor.

9  **The Parthenon**

- ⦿ The Parthenon is a many-columned temple that sits on the Athenian acropolis (the highest point of the city, where the gods were worshipped and where its citizens might retreat in time of war).
- ⦿ It is the most important surviving work of Greek architecture and is considered to be the pinnacle of art in the Doric order.

10  **The Parthenon**

11  **The Parthenon**

- ⦿ It was full of decorative sculptures, many of which still survive today and are considered to be the pinnacle of Greek art.
- ⦿ There are some very important pieces of artwork on the Parthenon that tell us much about Greek culture and myth, but it is important that we understand that it was a center of great idolatry and wickedness.

12  **The Parthenon**

- ⦿ It housed the statue of Athena Parthenos, the most renowned and important cult idol in Athens. This statue was 41 feet tall and covered in gold plates that alone weighed more than 1500 pounds.
- ⦿ Although it is the most memorable and longest-surviving, the Parthenon was by no means the only center for idolatry in Athens.

13  **Idolatry in Athens**

- ⦿ Athens was also the location of the temple to Athena Nike, celebrating the goddess's role in military might and victory.
- ⦿ It was also home to the Erechthion, commemorating the first olive tree planted by Athena in her conflict with Poseidon, and also housing the "sacred snake of the temple", whose well-being was believed to be vital for the continued existence of the city.
- ⦿

14  **Idolatry in Athens**

- ⦿ Athens was full of hundreds of temples to lesser deities, heroes, and cults.
- ⦿ The Temple of Rome and Augustus - Caesar was deified and worshiped as a god throughout the Roman Empire.
- ⦿ But Athens' pagan traditions also included two other locations that are important to understanding this passage: The Areopagus and the Temple of the Unknown God.

15  **The Areopagus**

- ⦿ "Areopagus" is Greek for "The rock of Ares." According to Greek myth, this was the place where Ares, the Greek god of war, was tried for the murder of the son of another one of the Greek gods.
- ⦿ In the early days of the Athenian democracy, the Areopagus had been the meeting place of the ruling body of the city's elders.

16  **The Areopagus**

- ⦿ By Paul's time, the Areopagus had lost much of its power due to Roman rule, but it remained a place of great importance in the city as a meeting place for the city's greatest minds.
- ⦿ The Areopagus was a large, rocky hill adjacent to the Acropolis.

17  **The Temple of the Unknown God**

- ⦿ In addition to the wide variety of temples, altars, and idols in Athens dedicated to the

twelve deities of the Greek Olympiad and countless lesser deities and heroes, there was also a temple dedicated to the worship of Agnostos Theos - the unknown God.

18 The Temple of the Unknown God

- ⦿ The Unknown God was the "Un-Greek God" - more than a temple to a specific god, it was a placeholder for any that they might have missed and thus angered.
- ⦿ The Unknown God was extensively written about by the Greeks, and very often the Athenians would swear by the Unknown God.

19 Paul in Athens

- ⦿ As Paul is walking through the city of Athens, he sees all of the idolatry, sin, and perversion running rampant through its streets and he is deeply grieved.
- ⦿ He preaches wherever people will listen: in the synagogues of the Jews, on the streets with the common people, and on the steps of the temples with the learned Greek scholars.

20 Epicureans

- ⦿ The Epicureans are one of two groups of philosophers which Scripture tells us Paul witnessed to and with which he had discussions.
- ⦿ They also represent one of the most important prevailing systems of thought in Athens at that time: Epicureanism.

21 Epicureanism

- ⦿ Founded on the teachings of Epicurus, Epicureanism was a form of materialism that, although it acknowledged the existence of divine power, believed it did not interfere in the world and that God or the gods were neutral.
- ⦿ It taught that personal pleasure attained through modest living and the pursuit of knowledge was the highest goal, and that by pursuing these things one could gain a state of "*ataraxia*" – perfect bliss.

22 Stoicism

- ⦿ Stoicism was the second of the prevailing philosophies in Athens at the time, and was founded upon the writings and teachings of the philosopher Zeno of Athens.
- ⦿ Stoicism was extremely popular throughout Greece and the Roman Empire, and many Roman emperors embraced stoicism until it was finally shut down in 529 AD.

23 Stoicism

- ⦿ Stoicism taught that destructive emotions resulted from errors of judgments.
- ⦿ Further, it taught that a person should try to be a sage – a person of "moral and intellectual perfection" – to avoid these destructive emotions.
- ⦿ They exalted the virtue of logic and of living in harmony with the universe.

24 Paul in Athens

- ⦿ Paul is taken to the Areopagus, and there he stands before the wisest and most powerful men of Athens.
- ⦿ The Athenians, "would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new."
- ⦿ It is Paul's response to Athenian idolatry and philosophy that provides the structure for how we, as believers, should respond to the world around us.

25 Confronting the Culture


- ⦿ When faced with evil, wickedness, idolatry, and error, the Church has traditionally responded in one of three ways – these are the same three ways in which we can respond today:
 - We can choose to Conform
 - We can Cloister ourselves
 - We can Confront the Culture

26  **Conform**

- ⊙ Of the three, this is the option that most of the church chooses.
- ⊙ In essence it says that the differences in morals between the Church and the World are merely cultural differences, and it seeks to bridge the gap between the two by adopting a similar cultural model to that of the world.

27  **Conform**

- ⊙ The primary problem with this line of thinking is that it violates one of the direct commands of Scripture:
- ⊙ *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Rom 12:2)

28  **Be not conformed**

- ⊙ This verse has some important implications:
 - First, we are commanded not to be conformed by our culture, but rather to be transformed by the Word of God.
 - It also acknowledges that it is difficult to know what things are “good and acceptable and perfect,” which is why it is so critical that we have our minds transformed.

29  **What transforms our minds?**

- ⊙ *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* (2Co 3:17-18)

30  **Freedom**

- ⊙ One of the distinguishing factors that a standard, a belief, a conviction, a moral is from God is that it results in freedom.
 - This is not always freedom to do what we please: that is not really freedom.
 - This freedom does mean that there is a lack of those things which enslave, addict, or control.

31  **Behold the glory**

- ⊙ The Bible tells us that there are three ways in which God’s glory has been revealed in the world around us:
 - General revelation (in creation)
 - The earthly coming and ministry of Jesus Christ
 - Special revelation (the Word of God) – this is the most valuable and the most glorious.

32  **A more sure Word**

- ⊙ *For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,* (2Pe 1:17-19)

33  **A more sure Word**

- ⊙ *...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2Pe 1:20-21)

34  **Transform your mind**

- ⊙ The mind of the believer is most surely and most effectively transformed to become like Christ when it is constantly immersed in and exposed to the Word of God.
- ⊙ It is then, by the Spirit of God, that we will be able to know which things will bring us into bondage, and which things represent a conformity with the culture.