

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

LESSON 21: CHAPTER 17

23 October 2015

PAUL IN ATHENS

TWO PRINCIPLE SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY IN ATHENS:

1. **EPICUREANS:** Founded by Epicurus (342-270 B.C.). Believed that indulgence was the key to life. They strove to partake of and to gratify all their earthly desires. "If it feels good, do it." Pleasure is important. The "*gods*" don't care what you're doing. There is no life after death. There is no judgment. Eat, drink, and be merry (Ecclesiastes 8:15, Luke 12:19). This philosophy leads to immorality.
 - a. Contrariwise, Christians are instructed to be temperate (1 Cor. 9:25), to do things in moderation (Phil. 4:5), and to "**yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness**" (Rom. 6:19).
2. **STOICS** : Founded by Zeno of Cyprus (340-260 B.C.). This is a fatalist philosophy: "you can't change what's going to happen. Everything is predetermined." God is the world's soul; everything is a part of God, including you. They strove to be moral, but it produced pride as they compared themselves to the immoral Epicureans. They taught that doing good to others was the supreme good. They taught against showing passion or emotion when faced with grief, pleasure, or pain.
 - a. The Bible: There is none righteous (Rom. 3:10), all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), there is none that doeth good (Psa. 14:1). Loving others is the second commandment (Mk. 12:31). Loving God is number one (Mk. 12:30). God created the world (Gen. 1:1)(He is not the world).

Vs. 16 Athens was "**wholly given to idolatry.**" There were no signs of anyone seeking to know the true and living God. This "stirred" Paul's spirit within.

Vs. 17 Paul began evangelizing in Athens. He disputed with the Jews in the synagogue. Surrounded by idolatry, their souls must have been vexed (2 Pet. 2:8). Every day Paul also disputed with "the devout persons" and with people in the market.

- This is the center verse of the New Testament. The subject is evangelism.

Vss. 18-21 Paul preached "**Jesus, and the resurrection**" (and obviously the deity of Christ, vs. 18) which prompted the Epicureans and the Stoicks to take him to their court of appeals and further explain his doctrines. This opened the door for Paul's sermon, which can be found today, inscribed on a stone on Mars Hill.

The Greek Culture promoted a pursuit of knowledge and information (vs. 21). They are "**ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth**" (2 Tim. 3:7).

PAUL'S SERMON

- Vs. 22** “**Ye are too superstitious**” (vs. 22). New Bibles substitute the word “superstitious” with “religious” to try and make Paul sound less rude. This is just more dishonesty promoted by the new bible translators. Paul looked at all the gods (idols) and observed the beliefs and traditions and honestly said, “you’re too superstitious.”
- Vs. 23** You “**ignorantly worship**” an “**unknown God.**” I’ll inform you about Him.
- Vs. 24** “**God..made the world and all things therein.**” Paul makes a clear distinction between the true God and their false gods. He is God; not “the god” of this or “the god” of that.
- “**He is Lord of heaven and earth.**” That covers the afterlife and the present life on earth.
- “**He..dwelleth not in temples made with hands.**” Paul is in the midst of many great temples in Athens atop a mountain called the Acropolis when he says this. These temples contained the idols and images of all the gods that the Greeks worshipped. Essentially, Paul is saying, “Your religion is vain. The REAL God isn’t in ANY of those buildings.”
- Vs. 25** God doesn’t need anything from you (vs. 25). Your offerings are vain. The true God gave you life and breath and everything you need to survive. (See James 1:17).
- Vs. 26** You’re no better than anyone else on the earth. God made everyone “**of one blood.**” God determined the times (of the nations). Nations come and go according to His purposes. God also determined the “bounds of their habitation” (the borders of the nations).
- Vs. 27** The reason that God gave men life and breath and nations with boundaries is to encourage men to “**seek the Lord... and find him.**” Paul points out that God is “**not far from every one of us,**” but you smart guys can’t seem to find Him.
- Vs. 28** God has given life to every soul (Job 12:10). Even the Greek’s poets said that life springs from God.
- Vss. 29-30** God isn’t anything like your idols. You think you’re intelligent, but you’re ignorant. God put up with your ignorance in times past, but that time is ended. He commands you to repent.
- Vs. 31** There is a day of judgment (they didn’t believe in judgment or the afterlife). They will be judged in righteousness by the One whom “**he hath raised...from the dead.**” Jesus Christ will be your judge in the afterlife, so you’d better repent.
- Vss. 32-33** Upon hearing of the “**resurrection of the dead,**” there was a mixed reaction. Some mocked, some needed to hear more, but some stuck by him and believed. (See Mark 4:3-8, parable of the sower).
- The problem in Athens was the hard ground, not the rough sermon of Paul. When you’ve got hard ground like this, you’ve got to break it up with a plow.