

Notes:



The Incompatibility of Paganism and Christianity "Building Bridges Not Walls" Acts 17:16-34

Stories Backdrop: Athens offered a home to almost every god that had been invented in the pantheon of the pagan Greek gods. Nearly every public building in Athens was also a shrine to one of their gods.

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 17:16-18

Community Group Questions:

1. In what ways is our culture similar to Athens in Paul's day?
2. How might we appeal to our culture as Paul did then?
3. Which of the seven points resonates most with you?
4. Which is more difficult for you in sharing, being gracious or being bold? Why?

Epicureanism: Epicurus, was a famous Athenian philosopher, around 300 B.C. He taught that the highest goal in life is pleasure, defined as the "absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul." They were functional Atheists; they didn't deny the existence of their gods they simply denied their relevance.

Stoics were far more influential. Their principal teaching came from Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who said, "the greatest goal in life is personal character improvements." Stoics also believed God's divine reason was everywhere in creation, and the existence of human logic proved the existence of an overarching logic that governed the universe. They called this the LOGOS.

¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, ...

Acts 17:19

The Areopagus, met on what we call today, Mars Hill, in the middle of Athens, not far from the great Parthenon that sits up on the highest hill. They were the supreme court of Athens. Thirty members in all.

...where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean."²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Acts 17:19-21

I. Paul appeals to them from their own perspective.

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you."

Acts 17:22,23

- Paul is building a bridge to the Athenians

II. God is Creator.

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.

Acts 17:24

- As the Creator, God cannot be contained.

III. God is a Giver

²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

Acts 17:25

- God has no needs.

IV. We are all equal before God

²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Acts 17:26

- God will not show partiality.

V. God is Near

²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'²⁹ Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.

Acts 17:26-29

- God rewards seekers

VI. God is the Ultimate Judge

³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Acts 17:30-31

- God has a plan for human history which includes judgment

VII. You cannot control the response

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."³³ At that, Paul left the Council.³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.¹After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. Acts 17:32-34

- You can only control your content; you can't control the response