

1) As we said last time, to really understand what Paul is up against with these philosophers at the Areopagus, we need to understand at least generally, what the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were all about.

2) Here are the quotes from John MacArthur again:

Epicurean philosophy was the teaching that pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the chief end of man. They were materialists, who, while not denying the existence of the gods, believed they did not intervene in the affairs of men. They taught that, at death, the body and soul (both composed of atoms) disintegrate; there is no afterlife.

The Stoic philosophers, on the other hand, saw self-mastery as the greatest virtue. They believed self-mastery comes from being indifferent to both pleasure and pain, reaching the place where one feels nothing. In contrast to the practical atheism of the Epicureans, the Stoics were *pantheists*.²² (identifies God with the universe).

3) Stoics were the Vulcans of Paul's day.

4) The Stoics incorporated the theory of eternal recurrence into their natural philosophy.

5) According to Stoic physics, the universe is periodically destroyed in an immense all-consuming fire, and then experiences a rebirth.

6) These cycles continue for eternity, and the same events are repeated in every cycle.

a) Paul is now in front of these Epicureans and Stoics and has been asked one straightforward question:

“May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean.”

7) As we indicated last time, they had no real interest in believing what he had to say, it was only curiosity at this point.

8) So, let's hear what Paul has to say.

Acts 17:22–34 (NIV)

1) Paul really pulls no punches with these folks – he is his normal “straight to the point” self.

2) He locks in on the “unknown god” and in some not so kind words, tells them:

²² John F. MacArthur Jr., Acts, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 131.

So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

- 3) Calling attention to someone's ignorance two time is probably not the best way to win friends and influence people but it does appear to get the job done.
- 4) Actually, turns out God has provided this as a brilliant strategy.
- 5) He is able to springboard this into an explanation of the worthlessness of their many gods and the supreme and wonderful difference exhibited by his one true God.
- 6) He asserts that God made the world and everything in it.
- 7) This was an upsetting truth for some of these folks to hear but also to many today as well. Again, MacArthur weighs in on this:

The truth that God is the creator of the universe and all it contains is just as unpopular in our day. The prevailing explanation by the ungodly for the origin of all things is evolution. It is taught dogmatically by its zealous adherents (including, sadly, many Christians) as a scientific fact as firmly established as the law of gravity. Yet evolution is not even a scientific theory (since it is not observable, repeatable, or testable), let alone an established fact.

He further states that ... :

Even Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard University, perhaps the most well-known contemporary defender of evolution, candidly admits, The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches; the rest is inference, however reasonable, not the evidence of fossils. ("Evolution's Erratic Pace," *Natural History* LXXXVI [May 1977]: 14) ²³

- 8) However, getting back to Athens, and specifically, Paul's message.
- 9) This announcement was likely upsetting to these folks in several ways.
 - a) To the Epicureans it ran contrary to their belief that matter was eternal and did not have a creator.
 - i) They would have also taken exception to the idea of resurrection since they believed that there was no afterlife – only dust.
 - b) To the Stoics who were pantheists and believed everything was part of God, this meant that He would have created Himself so that surely did not work.

²³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 131.

- i) They would have also had a problem with the resurrection resulting in eternal life since it would have messed up their cyclical universe theory.
- 10) After all was said and done, in vs 34, we see the very expectable and God ordained conclusion was that:
 - 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.
- 11) We are not told directly that a Church forms in Athens but with these results, one would think that it must have.
- 12) At any rate, Paul moves on to a new destination to plant a Church that there is no doubt exists – Corinth.

Corinth

- 1) We should begin with at least a little background on the city of Corinth.
- 2) Knowing what the city of Corinth was like at this time gives us a tremendous insight into why they suffered from the sins that seem to be so much apart of what Paul addresses in his letters to them.
- 3) At the time, Corinth had replaced Athens as the leading political and commercial center.
 - a) Corinth was a wicked city even compared to the larger cities of the empire at this time.
 - b) Its population was primarily mobile and consisted of seaman, businessmen, and government officials.
 - c) The very term “Corinthian” came to mean a profligate or wicked person.
 - d) “To Corinthianize,” meant to practice whoredom.
- 4) The Acropolis (a high outcrop) rises above Corinth and on top of that was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love.
- 5) There were one thousand priestesses, who were ritual prostitutes.
- 6) Each evening they would descend into the city to provide their services.
- 7) There are other stories and examples of the debauchery that went on in Corinth which we will not go into.
- 8) So, now that we see where Paul is going, let’s continue...

Acts 18:1–4 (NIV)

- 9) So the next chapter in this journey begins – new town but same wonderful and glorious message.
- 10) Also, there are two new people in Paul’s life – Aquila and Priscilla.

- 11) This becomes a friendship and partnership in ministry that will last many years.
- 12) This short introduction to Paul's arrival in Corinth brings out another fact that we should make sure to take note of – the Jews being expelled from Rome.
 - a) Claudius reigned from 41 to 54CE.
 - b) Looking at other factors, the expulsion likely took place in the 49CE to 50CE time frame.
 - c) Paul's arrival in Corinth at this point is also estimated to be around 49CE so perhaps at the beginning of the expulsion.
 - d) The major point is that the Jews are forced out of Rome and likely are not allowed to return until Claudius dies and is replaced by Nero in 54CE.
 - i) We really don't know what, if any, role Nero played in the return – likely none.
 - ii) Roman law sometimes treated such decrees as tied to the emperor who issued them.
 - iii) The Jewish population likely trickled back to Rome after Claudius' death without a specific emperor's permission.
 - e) We know that there is some Jewish presence when Paul writes to the Church at Rome.
 - i) We also know that Aquila and Priscilla were back in Rome at the time of the Letter to the Romans. (Rom 16:3)
 - ii) This letter was written in approximately 57CE.

Acts 18:5–11 (NIV)

- 1) Evidently, when Silas and Timothy arrive, Paul's situation changed for some reason which allowed him to stop working as a tent maker and devote full time to preaching.
- 2) Obviously a good thing with a not so good outcome – the Jews in the synagogue became opposed and abusive to Paul.
- 3) So, he shakes out his clothes in protest.
 - a) This is different from shaking the dust off his feet.
 - b) Shaking the dust off of your feet signifies rejection.

Matthew 10:14 (NASB 2020)

- ¹⁴ And whoever does not receive you nor listen to your words, as you leave that house or city, shake the dust off your feet.
- c) This implies a judgment on those who rejected the message.
 - 4) Shaking out his clothes according to one source is:
 - a) A way of saying "I'm done with you" or "I reject what you're doing."
 - b) It doesn't necessarily carry the same weight of judgment as shaking the dust off their feet.

- c) It focuses more on the individual's reaction to the situation. This is clear in Paul's final statement:

“Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Understanding and considering Paul's situation, do we have the same (responsibility) privilege of doing either of these things?

If so, what would be the circumstances?

- 5) Paul continues but I think we can read between the lines here and realize he is discouraged and perhaps ready to leave Corinth.
 - a) However, the Lord intervenes in a vision after which Paul stays there another year and a half.
- 6) Given the moral condition of the Corinthian populus and the content of the letters that are subsequently written to them, we can easily see the importance of this extended stay.
- 7) Moving on, we see that the Jews were not willing to let Paul alone.

Acts 18:12–17 (NIV)

- 1) This is another of those very feeble attempts at causing trouble.
 - a) The Jews try to get the Roman proconsul involved but he refuses because what they are charging is strictly a matter of Jewish law and violations – not Roman law at all.
- 2) Sosthenes is identified in 1 Cor 1:1 as a co-greeter in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church.
 - a) So, at that time, he most likely was a Christian and from what the crowd does here in this passage, we probably can assume he was then as well.
- 3) This is a case of jealousy, frustration, anger, and possibly hate resulting in loss of self control on the part of those who turn on Sosthenes.
- 4) If I may be candid, I personally think we have a greater amount of that type mentality today than I have witnessed at any point in my life.
- 5) We as beloved sons and daughters of God and servants of Jesus Christ must guard ourselves carefully to be sure we do not fall into this type of behavior in the climate we live in today.