

# Acts 17:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

## Analysis

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**His spirit was stirred in him** (παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ, parōxyneto to pneuma autou)—Paul experienced deep provocation, the same Greek root giving us 'paroxysm.' This wasn't mere annoyance but righteous grief over spiritual adultery. Athens, the intellectual crown of classical civilization, was a theological catastrophe.

**Wholly given to idolatry** (κατείδωλον, kateidōlon)—literally 'under idols' or 'full of idols.' Petronius said it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. The city that produced Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had descended into religious syncretism. Paul's response models how gospel proclamation begins with grief over human rebellion, not intellectual admiration of pagan philosophy.

## Historical Context

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Athens in AD 50-51 had long passed its political zenith but remained the philosophical capital of the Roman world. The Acropolis featured the Parthenon (dedicated to Athena), while the Agora contained altars to the Twelve Olympians, plus countless statues to gods, heroes, and deified abstractions. Pausanias later counted over 30,000 public statues. Paul encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (v.18) in this context.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

## Study Questions

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1. What modern 'idols' (wealth, status, ideology) should stir your spirit with the same grief Paul felt in Athens?
2. How does Paul's emotional response to idolatry inform Christian engagement with intellectually sophisticated but spiritually bankrupt cultures?

## Interlinear Text

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ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀθήναις ἐκδεχομένου αὐτῷ τοῦ Παύλου  
at Now G3588 Athens waited for him G3588 while Paul  
G1722 G1161 G116 G1551 G846 G3972

παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῷ ἐν αὐτῷ θεωροῦντι  
was stirred G3588 spirit him at him when he saw  
G3947 G4151 G846 G1722 G846 G2334

κατείδωλον οὐσαν τὴν πόλιν  
to idolatry wholly given G3588 the city  
G2712 G5607 G3588 G4172

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 119:158** (Parallel theme): I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

**Psalms 119:136** (Parallel theme): Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

**2 Peter 2:7** (Parallel theme): And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:

**Jeremiah 20:9** (Parallel theme): Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

**Mark 3:5** (Parallel theme): And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

**Micah 3:8** (Spirit): But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

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