

Teaching in Athens

Paul engages with the philosophers of Athens on Mars Hill, proclaiming the unknown God they worship as the Creator who raised Jesus from the dead.

Acts 17:16-34

CHARACTERS: Paul, Epicurean philosophers, Stoic philosophers, Dionysius, Damaris

THEMES: Apologetics, Gospel to intellectuals, God as Creator, Resurrection, Cultural engagement

WHILE PAUL WAITED in Athens for Silas and Timothy, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols. He reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. Some said, 'What does this babbler wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. They brought him to the Areopagus (Mars Hill), saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?'

Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and 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." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.'

He declared that 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—He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. From one man He made every nation to live on all the earth, determining their times

and boundaries, that they should seek God and perhaps reach out and find Him. 'Yet He is actually not far from each one of us, for "In Him we live and move and have our being."'

Paul quoted their own poets to establish common ground, then turned to the gospel: '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 human art. 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.'

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' Some men joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.

Paul had met the philosophers on their own ground and pointed them beyond their vain speculations to the living God and His risen Son.