

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for April 17, 2016

The Conversations With Paul in Athens
Acts 17:16-21

Acts 15:36-18:23 records Paul's second missionary journey to Greece. In Acts 17, Paul leaves the northern province of Macedonia and ministers in the southern province of Achaia, beginning in Athens, the cultural capital of the Roman Empire.

1. Idol aggravation (17:16)

Paul intended to wait for Silas and Timothy to complete their ministry at Berea before beginning his ministry in Athens but was moved to engage the people sooner due to the idols that he saw.

Ancient Athens was the center of idol worship, and Petronius, a satirical author during this time, quipped that there were more gods than men in the city. Pliny the elder estimated the number of public statues in Athens to be 30,000.

The word for "provoked" is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the anger of God toward idolatry (Isaiah 65:3; Hosea 8:5), and the only other place it is used in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 13:5, where love is said to not be provoked.

When we see worship which is not directed to God, we should be provoked internally but not at people. Our provocation is for God's glory and the proper response is to serve the idolaters through the gospel.

2. Idol analysis (17:17)

The marketplace (AGORA) was the center of civic life in Athens, with public buildings, commerce, temples and statues. It provided a common gathering place for Greek philosophers. Paul used the existing social system to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

3. Idle accusations (17:18)

Followers of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) considered that the chief end of man was individual pleasure, largely through the avoidance of pain. They were materialistic and did not believe in an afterlife.

Stoics adhered to the teachings of Zeno the Cypriot (340-265 B.C.) and emphasized individual self-sufficiency and overcoming pain through the self-mastery of indifference.

When we live to serve ourselves through personal enjoyment, we are modern-day epicureans. When we live to serve ourselves through personal sacrifice, we are modern-day stoics.

The Greek word for “idle babbler” literally meant seed picker, and was a derogatory figure of speech used to refer to second-rate philosophers who picked up bits of information and passed them off as if they knew what they were talking about.

Socrates was executed for promoting new and strange gods. Paul did more than engage with their philosophies, he preached the resurrected Jesus.

4. Idol attack (17:19-20)

The Areopagus was both a location and a group of around 30 city administrators. This group would decide whether Paul would be able to continue to participate in the philosophical exchanges in the marketplace.

5. Idle Athenians (17:21)

This verse is included to explain why Paul’s treatment in Athens was different than the cities in Macedonia. Paul received a hearing because of this desire to hear new things.

May our desire to learn be accompanied by our desire to obey, so that we may truly know the Lord.