

Series: Acts

Lesson #73

Title: Wholly Given to Idolatry

Scripture: Acts 17: 13-18

Date: June 11, 2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

Read Acts 17: 13-18

BY NATURE, MEN LOVE IDOLATRY (v16)

Athens (in Macedonia, what we know as Greece) represents the pinnacle of man's wisdom. Most have had to study Greek mythology in school. Some have had to study philosophy in school. This place where Paul stands is the center of it all.

Athens's had been the place of such schools of wisdom as: The Academy of Plato, The Lyceum of Aristotle, The Porch of Zeno (Stoics), The Garden of Epicurus (Epicureans). Athens is where the Parthenon stood. Greece, this city particularly, was noted for its art: Greek sculpture, Greek architecture, Greek theaters, all serving the common interest of their man-made gods. The public buildings were said to double as sanctuaries dedicated to one or more gods. Besides the ordinary mythical gods they also deified "Fame", "Modesty", "Energy", "Persuasion." and such.

You have seen how impressed many of our teachers have been with the Greek gods and with the wisdom of the philosophers. Many in our day still regard the Grecians as men advanced in wisdom. Yet, this is what the Holy Spirit of God says about the city of Athens: (v16), it was "wholly given to idolatry."

Schools still teach about these idols and these Greek gods, but of course we say it is not for religious reasons just for the sake of the artistry. Heinous crimes have been committed against individuals, particularly to their bodies. Can you imagine studying those things simply for the artistry. One might say, "That is not art!" The Holy Spirit says this was not art either.

Paul was not moved by the skill of the artist, but he saw these things and the makers of them and those who loved them as what the Spirit of God says they are "wholly given to idolatry."

You may have to learn about them in school but be sure you know that the Spirit of God says it is not art, it is idolatry

Romans 1: 22: Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23: And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24: Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies

between themselves: 25: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

TURNED FROM DUMB IDOLS, WHOLLY GIVEN TO CHRIST JESUS THE LORD (v16)

The child of God, born of the Holy Spirit, is turned by God from dumb idols and wholly given to Christ Jesus the Lord. Paul was not moved to admire these idols but to loathe them. Why is that? Paul had the law of God written on his heart. There is much more than the Ten Commandments included in the law of God written on the heart in the new birth--law of love, law of liberty, everlasting covenant, etc.

Yet, Paul said in Romans 7: 22, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." By the Holy Spirit of power and wisdom, Christ rules in the heart which he has created within the believer. Therefore, the believer is stirred against that which God is against.

Exodus 20: 2: I *am* the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: 5: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; 6: And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

So when Paul saw Athens wholly given to idolatry, he was jealous for the glory of God even as our God is a jealous God, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

I Corinthians 12: 2: Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. 3: Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. 4: Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5: And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6: And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Paul illustrates the difference between merely calling Christ Lord with the mouth and one who has the Spirit of God working in him. The apostle knew his Lord was with him and so without any help from any other man, without any restraint other than the love of Christ constraining him, without any moving power but the Spirit of grace working in him, he began preaching the truth against such great opposition as this. This is a very practical example of what Paul meant when he said, Romans 6:14: For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

HUMAN INTELLECT IS NOT ENOUGH (v17, 18)

No sinner is able to know and believe on God by mere human intellect. We see that in the three kinds of systems presented here. These are the three kinds of opposition that Paul faced.

First, in the synagogue were the Jews and the devout Greeks. Men and women can learn about God by looking into his word, these in the synagogue manifest that; men and women can imitate what others say and do outwardly, the Jews and the Greeks in the synagogue manifest that.

Still, they did not believe Christ had come. Like the Pharisees which our Lord faced as he walked this earth, these in the synagogue were content to pretend they were growing more holy by their obedience to the law of Moses. (We have seen this to be the case so far in every synagogue in which Paul preached.) I expect, like the Pharisees, that because the scriptures forbid them to have any images and because they did not join in with the idolaters of the city, they probably thought they were more righteous than those out-and-out idolaters. Their charade was just as much idolatry as the others. Their idol was themselves.

Secondly, were the Epicureans. They thought the world was made by atoms banging together and that the world is not governed by God. They believed that ultimate happiness comes by pleasure. Some thought you came at it by morality, some by immorality. They were liberal practitioners who pressed the importance of living out their system of doctrines.

Thirdly, were the Stoics. They believed there is a god and that the world was made by God, but that the world is governed by fate. They said that happiness rested in virtue which was its own reward. They said that a wise and good man is not moved by passions. He has no uneasiness of mind. We know the term "stoic" as one who is always the same; always at peace; ever happy no matter what he suffers. They held that the soul lives on after the body dies.

All of these, like men do in our day, enjoyed intellectual battle against the other but were considerate of one another and not too insistent that either was altogether right. Yet, when it came to Paul,

(v18) And some said, What will this babblers say? Other some said, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods

Isn't that amazing! With all the vast gods of men's imaginations (some say over 30,000 gods) not one of those were strange to them. But they said of Paul, "He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods." Why?

(v18) because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Their gods were of man, Jesus is God in human flesh; their gods were inanimate objects and imagination, Jesus is the Son of God, the living God; they were the creators of their god, their gods were created in their minds, their systems of doctrines were man-made, their images of their gods were created by their hands, the true and living God is before all things, by him were all things created, and he upholds all things; none of their gods could raise them to judgment, Paul preached the resurrection from the dead and after this the judgment. Indeed, the true and living God is a strange God to the religious and wise men of this world.

Still, why did Paul seem as one who was foolish, base, a babbler, a seed-picker? It is because the natural mind is unable to comprehend the gospel.

The Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." (Mt 13: 11.) God is known, believed, worshipped only when God enters a sinner and makes himself known by supernatural revelation. These men were fighting against the only hope they had, the preaching of the gospel.

At Thessalonica we saw how the most eminent, religious Jews refused to even hear of Christ the King. Now, here in Athens we have a synagogue AND we have the most eminent of philosophers and wise men of the Greeks and they called Paul a babbler.

1 Corinthians 1: 18: For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19: For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20: Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21: For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22: For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 3:18: Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

Colossians 2:8: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Oh, religious man! Oh, wise man! What is it that you think you can offer to God? Would you know the true and living God? Then hear him. Would you give unto the most High? Then offer only thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for his free and sovereign grace is the vow that God will have paid to him; praise for his only begotten Son who lived and died and is risen to the right hand of the Father having accomplished eternal redemption for his people, this is the

offering God accepts. Would you glorify God in your walk through this world? Then call upon God. He promises he will deliver you and perfect praise in you. In looking away from your sacrifices, from your "following after", and in thanking and calling upon the thrice Holy God to save you and keep you then do you follow after true Holiness.

Ps 50: 7: Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I *am* God, *even* thy God. 8: I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, *to have been* continually before me. 9: I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he goats out of thy folds. 10: For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills. 11: I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine. 12: If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof. 13: Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? 14: Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High 15: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

May God stir your spirits to follow after Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen!