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青少年团契 / Acts 17:22–34

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## Why do you think Paul points out that the men of Athens are very religious?

Greek mythology is famous worldwide, and many modern games, movies, and TV shows are based on it. From this, we can easily see that the Greeks had many gods, each being quite different. When Paul said they were "religious," he wasn't saying the Greeks were very devout but rather that they were eager to worship gods. They were afraid of not worshiping enough gods, so they invented many. Not only that, but they didn't want to miss any god, so they even set up an altar to the "unknown god," worried they might overlook one. In fact, they had indeed missed the one true God.

While the Greeks were passionate about worshiping spirits and gods, it was still humans searching for God, which eventually turned into Greek mythology. **People used their imaginations to create their own gods, and the gods they invented carried human sin, sometimes even worse.** What the Greeks did reflects what happens when people try to find God on their own—this is also the reality of most religions in the world. The Hindus have millions of gods, the Chinese have countless imagined gods, and the Egyptians had a wide variety of gods. People, on their own, cannot find the true God. **The only way to connect with this true God is for God to seek out people; otherwise, they cannot find Him, even if they sense His existence!**

## In verse 27, Paul says that God is close to each of us. What makes Paul so confident in this, and why do you think this message was important for the people of Athens?

Although people cannot directly find the true God, recognizing His existence is not difficult :

### **Romans 1:19–21 LSB**

because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made,

so that they are without excuse.

For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.

**If someone does not intentionally deny the existence of God, they can perceive His presence in every aspect of life. God reveals Himself through His creations.** A simple example is that no animal in the world engages in worship—only humans do. You won't see monkeys or dogs bowing down to wood or stone, but people from every culture and race exhibit this behavior. Why? **Because God has placed an awareness of His existence and a need to worship God within the human soul.** People naturally grow to recognize God's presence, and as they observe creation, they marvel at everything before them. God has given humans reason and logic, allowing them to easily perceive His existence.

On the other hand, if people intentionally choose not to acknowledge God, they can devise numerous ways to avoid Him. The first absurdity of modern humanity is this: they firmly believe, without any basis or reason, that there is no God and that everything came about through evolution. Despite ongoing scientific research, evolution has been completely discredited by fields such as genetics, fossil records, and geology. Evolution cannot explain the complexity of life, the origin of life, or the source of morality in the human heart. Even in the face of such clear evidence, people continue to cling to their belief in evolution. This is undoubtedly because they do not want to face a particular fact: God exists, God created everything, and His creations are accountable to Him. If people refuse to accept this fact, they cannot truly know Him.

Idolatry follows a similar pattern. When people hear the gospel but do not want to accept such a God, it is because this God does not align with their expectations or desires. So, they intentionally choose not to acknowledge Him. David said:

**Psalm 14:1 LSB**

The wicked fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

They act corruptly, they commit abominable deeds;

There is no one who does good.

David was completely right. **Although God is not far from us, and our every action and existence depends on Him, if we lose God's provision, we would cease to exist. Yet, because people intentionally refuse to acknowledge Him, they would rather live in lies than enter the truth.** This is indeed a very tragic thing."

## **Why do you think Paul quotes writers the Athenians know and**

## claim as their own?

"This world is filled with many false theories, wrong values, and incorrect worldviews, all of which stem from human sinfulness. However, this does not mean that these theories are 100% disconnected from the truth. Even though humanity is affected by sin, people can still grasp partial truths from the created world. In fact, many human theories contain a very small amount of truth that aligns with reality. **Christians reject these theories and philosophies because the majority of their content is extremely wrong and dangerous, even if there are a few correct elements, which are often hard to discern.**

Paul quoted lines from poets well-known to his audience because these particular statements did not contradict the truth. He used them as a starting point for sharing the gospel, helping people listen and engage. **Paul used the Athenians' own logic to argue his point: that worshiping idols is absurd.** Through this, he pointed out their errors and then went deeper into explaining who the true God is."

## What do the three responses to Paul in verses 32-34 tell you about how people might respond to the gospel? Do you think Paul's preaching in Athens was a failure?

There are three different reactions in total. The first reaction is mockery towards Paul; they mocked Paul for speaking about the resurrection of the dead, which they could not believe.

The second reaction was one of interest in what Paul said. They came out of curiosity, yet the message never entered their hearts, and they did not believe. Do you know how the Bible describes the people of Athens? Take a look at Acts 17:21

Acts 17:21 "(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something newer.)"

The Athenians loved hearing about new things—it was a form of entertainment for them. They weren't really interested in whether what they heard was true; they just wanted to be entertained by something new. This love for novelty and curiosity is something we still see a lot in today's world. **Many people love exploring different ideas and learning about new philosophies, but they rarely stop to ask if any of it is true. It doesn't impact their lives; it's just something they enjoy.**

When the gospel is shared with them, it might get their attention, but it rarely touches their hearts. They might understand Christianity on an intellectual level, but they're far from becoming followers of Christ. They don't recognize their sins or turn away from their sins. Instead, they tend to criticize Christianity, as if they're wiser than anyone else.

We need to be careful, especially since many people like this are found in universities.

We should be compassionate toward them, but we also need to stay alert so that we don't fall into the same trap.

The final group were those who heard the message, believed, and followed Jesus Christ.

Paul's preaching in Athens was not a failure; no one can control the faith of the audience, nor can one make others believe through eloquence. Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is God's gift. We need to clearly and firmly preach the Gospel to people, while praying in our hearts for God to change their hearts. **The foolish say there is no God, and on their own, people will not seek God. Only the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, can transform a person's heart to turn to Him.**

Additionally, when we share the Gospel, we can follow Paul's example. He was very familiar with the culture of Athens, which helped him better establish channels for preaching the Gospel. Similarly, when we share the Gospel, it is beneficial to first understand the cultural background of the people we are reaching. Different backgrounds lead to different questions about the Christian faith, and these questions can undoubtedly be major obstacles to knowing the true God. If we can address these questions with answers from the Bible, it will greatly help people come to know the true God.

## **Why is idol worship so offensive in God's eyes? What are the main idols being worshiped in your culture, and to what extent is your response to that idol-worship the same as Paul's was in Athens?**

The reason why idolatry is so detestable is that human beings, as created beings, attempt to define the Creator according to their own desires; this is a great offense to God. **Man cannot define God; rather, God defines man. The gods that humans define are often based on their own sins—these gods are filled with various desires, indulgence, and deceit, and they serve human desires.** This is vastly different from the true God's attributes of holiness, righteousness, mercy, goodness, and faithfulness.

**Furthermore, idolatry is not limited to religious practices; people also worship things outside of religion. Humanity can idolize money, power, and even science.**

For example, in the last century, people idolized science, believing that science could solve all problems, including eliminating all human sin and death. They believed that through science, human society could enter a perfect world and become a utopia. With such illusions, people worshiped science. It wasn't until the two world wars in succession that humanity woke up, realizing that science could not solve all problems.

Science cannot solve human sin; instead, it became a tool for sinners. **Likewise, science cannot help people escape the reality of death, and even today, many still idolize science. In fact, science is meant to explain the laws governing the present world, but it cannot solve everything, and it certainly cannot surpass its Creator.**