

The Unknown God. Acts 17v16-34.

Athens was not exactly on Paul's missionary programme. During the days he waited there for his friends to rejoin him he would have the opportunity to see the sights in the city. Athens still retained in her buildings something of her former glory, with her masterpieces of architecture and sculpture. Today when a traveler visits this city he can admire the works of art: no one sees them as anything more. But in the first century they were temples and images of pagan deities. The city was 'full of idols' and Paul's spirit was stirred and he began to preach the gospel. The philosophers brought him to Mars Hill, where the Court of the Areopagus met, the court which had some jurisdiction over visiting preachers like Paul.

He explains that he had grasped that the Athenians were very religious almost to the point of superstition. He had noted that among all the representations which he had seen in the city there was one to the 'unknown God'. He would now preach to them of the God whom they did not know – the true God.

(a) CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE

He is the Creator of the universe and everything in it and is also The Lord of heaven and earth. He is sovereign and still in control, Heb.1v3. There is no distinction allowed between a Supreme Being and a lesser being who fashioned the material world. Also, no human temple or shrine could contain such a being.

(b) THE ALL-SUFFICIENT GOD

Now he speaks of the asaiety of God. The God who created all things does not require anything from his creatures. See Ps. 50v9-12; Micah 6v6. Far from their supplying any need of his, it is he who supplies every need of theirs. He gives to them 'life and breath and all things'.

(c) THE MAKER OF MANKIND

The Creator of all things is the Creator of mankind. The people of Athens might pride themselves as to their superior pedigree, but Paul insists that all mankind is one in origin – all created by God from one ancestor.

(d) THE CONTROLLER OF THE SEASONS

The God who made the whole human race has given them the whole earth to dwell in. He determined the times or seasons set for them – either the annual provision of food in harvest or the length of time that they will exist - and the places where they will live.

(e) THE SUSTAINER OF LIFE

The purpose was that they would seek God in the hope that they will feel after them and find him. In fact, he was not far removed from any one of them. Paul stresses this by two references from Greek poets, Epimenides of Crete, who in a line could say, 'for in thee we live and move and have our being', and Aratus, who wrote about men as 'the offspring of God'. Since their own poets could thus speak they must surely realize that they should not conceive of God as housed in a temple or able to be represented by a material image. But rather than responding to God who was near and who sustained their lives they rebelled against him and rejected his authority over them. All men are sinners and only deserve God's wrath.

(f) A GRACIOUS GOD

God in longsuffering had passed over this ignorance and rebellion. But now a perfect revelation of him had been given. Men must therefore repent and receive the revelation of God given in the good news.

(g) THE GOD TO WHOM YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE

God is not only Creator, Sustainer but also Judge. He will bring you before him. You are accountable to him. You need to get right with him now. He raised the Lord Jesus. He will raise you – he has given this assurance.

God commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world, whereof he has given assurance unto all men in that he has raised him from the dead. And when they heard...

WHO DOES PAUL SPEAK OF? God. The God they did not know. You ought to know about him.

WHY DOES HE SPEAK OF HIM?

He commands – the creature because he is creator and they were made to glorify him. 'All men everywhere' – you are not excluded – all men have something of which they should repent.

He appoints – a day of judgement. He can because he is in control of all things.

He assures – raised him from the dead.

The resurrection comforts – those who have lost loved ones

The resurrection challenges – those who need power it is there.

The resurrection compels – to share the finished work.

The resurrection confounds – no escape – he will also raise you!

BUT He also accepts

WHAT MUST THEY DO?

'repent'. Because of another day. 'Unto you is born this *day* a saviour'

His coming and cross means acceptance. But it must be 'now'. 2 Cor. 6v2 'Now is the *day* of salvation' Prov.27v1 'Boast not thyself...knowest not what a *day* bring forth'.

If had been allowed he would have gone on to speak of the cross.

'Some mocked, some said hear again, some believed'.