

# Good News in a Marketplace of Ideas

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## Acts 17:15-34 Translation TR Paul brings the Good News to Athens

<sup>15</sup> Those who guided Paul led him to Athens, and when they received instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to Paul as quickly as possible, they returned home.

<sup>16</sup> While Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked in him as he saw the city was full of images of gods. <sup>17</sup> So on the one hand, he began discussing in the synagogue with the Jews and the Gentiles there who revered God, and also in the marketplace (*agora*) every day with any who happened to be there.

<sup>18</sup> Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What's this phrase-dropper trying to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a spokesman for foreign divinities" (*daimonia*) – because he was announcing the good news of "Jesus" and "the Rising" (*Anastasis/Resurrection*).

### Paul before the Areopagus

<sup>19</sup> And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "Are we permitted to know what this new teaching is that you're presenting?" <sup>20</sup> Since you're introducing some startling things for us to hear, we want to know what these things mean." <sup>21</sup> Now all Athenians and outsiders who live in the city used to spend their time in nothing else than in telling or hearing the newest thing.

<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, spoke: "Athenians, I observe that in every way you reverence all divine beings. <sup>23</sup> For as I passed along and observed your objects of worship, I even found a standing altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' So, that which you piously revere but do not know is just what I'm proclaiming to you.

<sup>24</sup> The God who made the cosmos and everything in it, since he's Lord of heaven and earth, doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. <sup>25</sup> Nor is he looked after by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to everyone life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one every nation of humans to dwell on all the face of the earth, since he marked out ordered seasons and the limits of human habitation. <sup>27</sup> His purpose was for them to seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him, though actually, he's not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup> It's just as some of your own poets have said,

*'In him we live and move and exist'* [Epimenides, 6<sup>th</sup> c. bc]; and again,

*'For we are indeed his offspring'* [Aratus 3<sup>rd</sup> c. bc, Cleanthes, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. bc].

<sup>29</sup> Now if we're God's offspring, it's not appropriate for us to consider that the divine is like gold or silver or stone – some image formed by human art and imagination. <sup>30</sup> Well, the ages of such ignorance God is ignoring, but right now he's giving instruction to people – all people, everywhere – to change their way of thinking. <sup>31</sup> This is because he set a day on which he will render his judgment on the human realm and set it right in the person of a man whom he marked out. God provided a trustworthy sign for all people by causing him to rise from the dead."

<sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of a "rising" of dead people, some mocked. But others said, "We're going to listen to you again about all this." <sup>33</sup> So Paul departed from that assembly. <sup>34</sup> But some stayed in his company and came to faith, among whom were Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and also a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

## Acts 14:15-17 Translation TR Paul & Barnabas restrain the people of Lystra,

<sup>15</sup> "People, why are you doing these things? We're human just like you, with the same feelings you have. We're bringing you good news so that you can turn away from these powerless things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. <sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all the nations to go down their own paths. <sup>17</sup> Yet he didn't leave himself without witness: He was always doing good for you by giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 Translation TR The Gospel: "Open Presentation of the Truth"

<sup>1</sup> Since we have this ministry as an expression of the mercy we've received, we never lose heart. <sup>2</sup> Rather, we've renounced any practices we'd want to conceal because they bring shame. We simply don't act with any deceptive cunning, nor do we falsify the message of God. But rather by the open presentation of the truth, we're commending ourselves to every human conscience, knowing that we're directly in God's presence.

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## The Marketplace of Ideas and Reality

In a marketplace of ideas, diverse points of view are competing for attention and acceptance. People compete to promote their views. The best ideas are supposed to win most followers. We love the concept! We also see that marketplace producing specialists in selling ideas, shaping opinion, lobbying those in power. Those with most resources often win. That's life. "Paul in Athens" doesn't turn out right. To be effective, shouldn't it be a story of success? But we see few converts. Here, Paul doesn't win the competition of ideas. Why tell the story? Paul comes to the famous heart of Greek civilization. He goes both to the Synagogue and into the Agora, center of civic and cultural life. He talks to anyone, but advocates of famous philosophies challenge him: Stoics and Epicureans, both schools more than 300 yrs old with complex teachings. Paul is superficial talking about new divinities, Jesus and the Rising. Aeschylus long ago told that Apollo instructed the Areopagus that there's no Rising after death. They take him to the Areopagus.

## Do Philosophers (or Secular Friends) Need God?

Stoics and Epicureans didn't need a Gospel. They had their own: how to live well, in undisturbed calm in a troubled world. They had dealt with popular "gods," incorporating them into a philosophical system. The Stoics with a kind of pantheism: a single web of material nature, guided from within by reason (logos). Don't fight it. Be free from passion. Epicureans: Gods are far away and happy, not interested in us. Death is annihilation with nothing to fear. Withdraw from trouble and find peace in a quiet garden with friends. Paul doesn't dispute that they live well. He had said as much to crowds in Lystra. They surround themselves with piety. But they have no God worthy of their philosophies.

## The Heart of Reality Seen in a Person

Paul tells of God as exalted, transcendent and also more earthy than they can grasp. God shows his reality in a specific person and event. God is not against philosophy as it feels after God. But God's unexpected reality breaks through in an event – rising from death. The marketplace of ideas does not produce the unique event of "a man" dying and raised, who is the expression of God's judgment setting the whole world right by resurrection. Some mock. Some believe. The event becomes the starting point for philosophy and ethics.