

THE HOMILY AT ATHENS: THE APOSTLE PAUL AND RELIGIOUS OTHERS

(ACTS 17:22-34)

A Paper

Presented to

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Western Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

THS 665Q, Religions, Salvation, and the Gospel

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October 20, 2009

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: First, it is an exegetical study of Acts 17:22-34. Second, it is an attempt to gather some principles from the ministry of the Apostle Paul that would be applicable to modern questions regarding a Christian “theology of religions”. In other words, we hope to establish some methodology for Christian proclamation to those of other religious persuasions that is grounded in the example of the great missionary-Apostle. This means that there may be some aspects of the text that are important but that will not be discussed in detail because it does not contribute to the overall thesis of the paper. Other areas of the passage may be given more attention for the opposite reason.

Preface (Acts 17:16-21)

Before we can exegete the homily found in vv. 22-34 we must examine the setting provided to us by the author in vv. 16-21. The Apostle Paul is in Athens. As he examines the many idols he becomes upset at what he sees. According to Livy,¹ “Athens...has...statues of gods and men—statues notable for every sort of material and artistry”. The Apostle like most monotheistic Jews of his day is disgusted by this sort of paganism.

In Rom. 1:18-28 he outlines how idolatry dehumanizes humanity. Humans reject the knowable God (vv. 20-21). This results in the *imago Dei* of Gen. 1:26-27—where humans are the representative of God to the created order—being fractured to the point that humans worship the very creation that God told them to subdue (Gen. 1:28; Rom. 1:23). The Apostle says that humans now digressively worship birds, then four-footed animals, then crawling things, before the confusion climaxes in self-worship which is depicted most graphically in homosexual eroticism (Rom. 1:23-28). Therefore the Apostle sees the root of dehumanization as essentially idolatry.

¹ Livy 45.27 cited in Hans Conzelmann, *Hermeia: Acts of the Apostles*, 138.

Although this text is a Lukan depiction of the Apostle it is a very good one echoing his teachings throughout this narrative. While there is not room to address those scholars who see this whole scene as a Lukan invention we will assume here that this is (1) parallel to Pauline theology in so many ways that arguments against historicity appear misguided and (2) it is a Lukan summary of what was likely a longer, more detailed speech, therefore it will sound Lukan at certain points because this is the author retelling this story.

As is the custom of the Apostle he begins by reasoning with Jews and proselytized Gentiles, but it was the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers that requested to hear more of what he was saying (vv. 17-18). There is some debate over whether or not the Apostle was arrested for preaching foreign gods or invited to come tell the city council about his new ideas. Conzelmann notes that ἐπιλαβόμενοι in v. 19 could refer to a hostile arrest *or* a friendly invitation.² Ancient historians seem to understand the Athenians from both perspectives as well. Josephus wrote that “the penalty decreed for any who introduced a foreign god was death”³ Meanwhile, Strabo wrote that the Athenians “welcomed so many of the foreign rites”.⁴ Whatever the motive may have been the audience did not invite the Apostle because his message impressed them but because he was ὁ σπερμολόγος –or a “scavenger” or “seed-picker” of ideas (v. 18).⁵

The Epicureans and Stoics were “two of the best known philosophical schools of the period”.⁶ “The Epicureans were followers of Epicurus (341-270 BC) and were indifferent to gods, viewing them as too removed to be objects of concerns (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10.1-21). They were like agnostic secularist.”⁷ “Epicurus believed that, on the basis of a radical materialism which dispensed with transcendent entities such as the Platonic Ideas or Forms, he

² Ibid. 139.

³ Josephus, *Contra Apion* 2.267 cited in Ibid. 140.

⁴ Strabo 10.471 cited in Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. 139.

⁶ Darrel L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: Acts*, 561.

⁷ Ibid.

could disprove the possibility of the soul's survival after death, and hence the prospect of punishment in the afterlife. He regarded the unacknowledged fear of death and punishment as the primary cause of anxiety among human beings, and anxiety in turn as the source of extreme and irrational desires.”⁸ It will become evident from the sermon that Paul proclaimed ideas that stood in direct contrast with the Epicurean ideas of (1) an unknowably transcendent deity and (2) the afterlife.

The Stoics were named after “the Stoa” where Zeno—their founding teacher—would teach.⁹ “They were pantheist who argued for the unity of humanity and kinship with the divine (Diogenes Laetius *Lives* 7.1-160).”¹⁰ While the Apostle did not side with the Stoics it is apparent that he had more in common with them. This mirrors Paul’s appearance before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1-11 where Paul was neither with the Sadducees or the Pharisees, but he strategically sided with the Pharisees regarding the resurrection (which interestingly enough is the climactic topic of the discussion in Athens as well).

It is interesting that these philosophers did not appear to understand the Apostle. Paul proclaimed τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνά . This was understood to be ἐνὼν δαίμονίῳν. In other words, the Athenians may have understood Paul to be proclaiming Jesus and a female deity known as “Resurrection”.¹¹ The author successfully positions the Athenians as an audience that is “ignorant” despite their attempt to mock Paul before and after his sermon.

Finally, before we engage the text of vv. 22-34 we ought to note the similarities between the “trial” of Paul and that of Socrates. C.K. Barrett argues that “the writer has probably gone out

⁸ “Epicurus”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy accessed from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epicurus/> on 17 October 2009.

⁹ Bock, 561.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd. Ed. H writes, “the clause implies that Paul’s hearers understood Ἀνάστασις as a female deity parallel with Jesus”. He is referring to ὅτι... εὐηγγελίζετο. 404.

of his way to hint at an analogy with Socrates”.¹² This is because the statement about Paul διελεγτο in v. 17 is similar to the description given of Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*¹³. Also, the phrase “foreign gods” (ένων δαιμονίων) echoes Xenophon’s description of Socrates

(“and of brining in strange deities”).¹⁴ It may be that the author is attempting to depict the Apostle as a neo-Socrates, but it is equally possible that this is the traditional language related to how the Athenians spoke of foreign and potentially dangerous deities. It has little to do with the interpretation of the text either way.

Exegesis of Primary Text (Acts 17:22-34)

²² Σταθεὶς δὲ [ὁ] Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου πάγου ἔφη· ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ.

Now *the* Paul was standing in the middle of the Areopagus saying, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious according to all things.

There is less of a scenic, more of a chronological shift between vv. 21 and 22. δὲ functions to indicate that transition. This portion of the passage will focus upon the *homily* given by the Apostle Paul to the men of Athens on the Areopagus (also known as “Mar’s Hill”). That Paul was “standing in the midst of the Areopagus” likely means he is standing in the midst of the crowd gathered rather than in the midst of a specific location.

The vocative ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι signifies (1) a shift from setting the scene to describing the speech given by Paul and (2) the audience of the speech. indicates that Paul did not merely “see” the idols, but he took the time to become familiar with them. This allowed Paul to conclude that his audience was “very religious”.

¹² C.K. Barrett, *The International Critical Commentary: Acts*, 824.

¹³ Plato, *Apology* 19d cited in Conzelman, 139.

¹⁴ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1; see also Plato, *Apology* 11. 24b cited in Ibid.

There has been some discussion as to the meaning of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους. F.F. Bruce appears to lean toward the negative “superstitious”¹⁵ while others argue that “religious” serves a better purpose since it is neutral enough to be understood as negative or positive depending on the hearer *just like* the English word religious.¹⁶ Furthermore, the word is comparative making the superlative translation “very religious” the best rendering of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους.

That the Athenians were religious in “all things” (κατὰ πάντα) echoes a common sentiment. Sophocles said that the Athenians were the “most devout”.¹⁷ Josephus said they were “the most pious of Greeks”.¹⁸

²³ διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ Ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ Σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ Βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεέγραπτο· ἄγνωστω θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ Καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

For *while* going through and carefully observing the objects of your worship I also found an alter upon which it has been written: ‘To the unknown god’. Therefore, what you unknowingly worship, this thing I proclaim to you.

The opening sentence of v. 23 further expounds on in v. 22. Louw-Nida describe σεβάσματα as sanctuaries or objects of worship.¹⁹ The UBS Greek Lexicon echoes this describing it as either an object or place of worship.²⁰ One of these objects of worship was a “raised object” or an “alter” (βωμὸν) that stood out to Paul because it was dedicated to “an unknown god”.

There has been much writing dedicated to the fact that there has yet to be found an idol with this phrase in the singular but there have been several with that phrase or similar phrases in the plural—to unknown gods. It has been suggested that (1) Luke/Paul stated it in the singular to

¹⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, 335.

¹⁶ Bock, 564.

¹⁷ Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 260 cited in Conzelman, 140.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Contra Apion* 2.130 cited in Ibid.

¹⁹ Louw-Nida Greek Lexicon, 5741.

²⁰ UBS Greek Lexicon, 5432.

emphasis a monotheistic worldview or (2) Paul never said such a thing and the author of Acts made it up based on second hand knowledge. All of this is really useless hypothetical speculation since there very well could have been an idol dedicated to a singular deity that Paul came across that has not survived to this day. Yet the main point stands: Paul begins from a monotheistic starting point.

For the Apostle “knowledge” of God is central to the salvific act of God. The Athenians “worship” (εὔσεβειτε) God indirectly as an unknown god, but they are ignorant of His identity. This is similar to the critique written by Paul regarding zealous Jews who seek to please God by obeying the Law but do so in ignorance (Rom. 10:2). Piety and zeal are insufficient. God must be known.

²⁴ ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ

The God, the One making the cosmos and all the things in it, this One is Lord of heaven and earth, He does not dwell in hand-made temples.

The nominative following a nominative (ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας) functions in an *epexegetical* capacity. The God *is* the One making. The Apostle begins his announcement about the true God by proclaiming Him as the Creator God.

The global reign of the God he proclaims is summed up by God being the κύριος of heaven *and* earth. Since God is Creator and Lord this allows for a polemic against the σεβάσματα mentioned in v. 23. This polemic is not new with Paul. King Solomon knew that the Jewish temple was insufficient to contain God (2 Chron. 2:6). Even pagans such as Zeno, Seneca, and Lucian could write against building temples to God.²¹

²¹ Conzelmann, 141.

χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς is a reference to temples made by humans. These are “hand-made”.

This may suggest that God is not against temples, per se, but those made by humans. God creates His own temples (e.g. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Rev. 11:19; 21:22).

²⁵ οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·

Neither is He cared for by the hands of men—as if He needed anything! He Himself is giving unto all life and breathe and all things.

The suggestion that humans can “care for” (θεραπεύεται) God is basically a description of idolatry. Those gods that are hand-made gods are also gods that humans must maintain. The God that the Apostle proclaims is not a god who needs to be maintained.

At this point Paul turns from his critique of paganism to his own understanding of God. God is the one who gives “life”, “breathe”, and “all things”. In other words, God is the One who sustains; humans do not sustain God.

²⁶ ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς, ὀρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν

He made from one all nations of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, determining preset times and the fixed boundaries of their dwelling.

There is a short chiasm located in v. 24b through 26:

A. God does not dwell in hand-made temples (v. 24b).

B. God is not cared for by the hands of people (v. 25a).

C. God is the One giving to all people all things (v. 25b).

B'. God made humanity (v. 26a).

A'. God determines where humans dwell (v. 26b).

That God made all people ἐξ ἑνὸς is likely a reference of Adam. This affirms the “brotherhood” of humanity espoused by the Stoics, but it is based on the biblical worldview Paul would have received from studying Torah.

προσ τεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν is understood by most to refer to “the regular periods in the history of nations and their set geographical boundaries” or the ordering of seasons and habitable zones. Joseph A. Fitzmyer notes that “In any case, divine determination seeks to guide human beings: so they are to seek out the God who is near to them.”²² We argue here that Paul would have been influenced by the depiction of God found in the writings of the Hebrew prophets who understood God as moving nations around at His will. Therefore, God placed human groups in specific locations at specific times in history according to His own wise purposes.

²⁷ ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὔροιεν, καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.

Seeking God, if consequently they might have groped around for him and may have found him—He is not far from each one of us.

ψηλαφήσειαν and εὔροιεν are functioning in a conditional optative mood. This suggests a “possible condition in the future, usually a remote possibility”.²³ Both of these words are in aorist tense. This places the action sometime in the undefined past. Therefore, it appears that an aorist with a conditional optative mood is presenting something like a hypothetical situation. In other words, the Apostle would be telling his audience that God placed people in the right places during the right times in history for those people to seek God—if this would have been something that these people did in actuality.

²² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, 609.

²³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar, Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. 484.

Since the optative is a mood of possibility D.L. Bock that this is “expressing a possibility of finding God”.²⁴ This would suggest that so-called “natural theology” can function in such a way that humans can find God without special revelation. While there is a lot of possibilities connected to such a statement we must note that the context suggest that the optative hinted at possibility without actual fulfillment. This would align with Paul’s words in Rom. 1:18-21 where “natural theology” only serves as a mean of just judgment against humans but *not as a means of coming to know God*. It is the gospel alone that has this function in Pauline thought (e.g. Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:18).

At this juncture we must make a theological-excursus to discuss questions related to foreknowledge, predestination, and free will. In his own writings the Apostle argues that there is no one who actually seeks for God (e.g. Rom. 3:10-18). While this passage is Lukan it affirms this Pauline thesis by showing that people do not actually appear to seek for God—even though God places people in a position where it might have been possible to find Him. Although the author does not state that it was impossible for humans to seek God he does appear to portray the Apostle as saying that if anything *people did not actually seek God*.

Why did God place people at specific places at specific times if this had no effect on the outcome of salvation-history? Again, it is assumed here that while the *Acts of the Apostles* was not written by the Apostle it does appear to have been written by someone who was very familiar with him and his teachings. In order to make sure that this passage has the opportunity to address the question of “religious others” we will approach this question from a canonical approach.

We must briefly summarize the Pauline *ordo salutis* in Romans 8:29-30. It appears to be an attempt at a chronology of sort: God foreknows (προέγνω) before God predestines (προώρισεν) . Those are the one’s whom God has called (ἐκάλεσεν) and therefore justified

²⁴ Bock, 566.

(ἐδικαίωσεν) and therefore glorified (ἐδόξασεν). Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification are all (1) a work of God and (2) in the aorist suggesting events that has occurred at an undefined period in the past.

It is not something that God foreknows, but people. We cannot therefore agree with Arminians who understand this passage as referring to God's foreknowing *who will choose Him*. Equally, God does not predestine arbitrarily. Predestination is subsequent to foreknowing. Therefore, we cannot agree with hyper-Calvinism. Rather, we suggest Calvinistic middle knowledge as the best explanation of Paul's order.

According to Craig Blomberg “...middle knowledge claims that God's perfect, infinite knowledge must be able to know not only what sentient creatures will freely choose in all situations in their lives but what everyone would do in every possible situation that they could confront. Even more magnificently, divine and unlimited knowledge must be able to discern what all possibly created beings would do in all possible situations (or, as philosophers like to say, all possible worlds).”²⁵ If we understand this from a Calvinist viewpoint we understand that humans are unable to freely choose God, but we affirm with Arminians that God does not arbitrarily elect either. Rather, God can see all people everywhere at all times in all possible worlds. God uses this knowledge to determine *who would choose to receive salvation if it was possible to do so*. God elects those people thereby making that choice an actual possibility.

To make some biblical sense of this we must now survey the pre-Christian person found in Romans 7:14-25. The Apostle explores the pre-Christian Jew representing the human race.²⁶ This person is a “slave to sin” (v. 14). This is another way of describing what Christian theology

²⁵ Craig Blomberg, “Middle Knowledge” accessed from <http://www.denverseminary.edu/craig-blombergs-blog-new-testament-musings/middle-knowledge/> on 2 October 2009.

²⁶ We have to assume this meaning of the text here due to lack of space. It is understood that there are various interpretations of the text including those who think it includes the life of Christians who struggle with sin. Our point is not actually affected either way.

calls “total depravity”. Equally, total depravity does not mean that humans do not have a sense of what is right and wrong for this person does what they do not want to do—that which they hate doing (v. 15).

He is able to confess that God’s Law is good though he cannot keep it (v. 16), but sin controls human actions (v. 17, 20). Paul says this person has *the desire to do what is right* but he cannot. Instead he does evil (vv. 18-19). In the inner man there is a delight in the Law of God (v. 22) but sin is dominant (v. 23). The only one who can rescue a person in such a condition is God through Jesus Christ (vv. 24-25)!

A Calvinist middle knowledge understanding of election and free-will can acknowledge a few important principles derived from these texts along with Acts 17:27: (1) God foreknows people before predestining them, therefore God knows everything about everyone. (2) People cannot choose good since sin dominates their nature, but people can have a desire to do good. (3) God has placed all people from all times and all places in a position where they might seek and find Him. (4) Therefore, God can see who desires to seek God and who desires to choose God but cannot do so because of sin. (5) God elects those people predestinating that these people will choose Him through the gift of faith therefore leading to the perseverance of the saints which although points toward the future is already actualized in the mind of God who has called, justified, and glorified.

²⁸ ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, ὡς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ’ ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν· τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

For in Him we live and we move and we exist, just even some of poets of yours have said, ‘For we are also His descendents’.

γὰρ signifies that v. 28 supplies the basis for the statement made in v. 27. The *reason* why humans should seek God is because God is near. F.F. Bruce sees the two statements in v. 28

as quotations. “For in Him we live and we move and we exist” echoes Epimenides the Cretan who wrote, “For in you we live and move and have our being”. “For we are also His descendents,” echoes Aratus who wrote, “In every way we have all to do with Zeus, for we are truly his offspring.”²⁷

Paul is well-known for reading Torah through the Christ-event. It appears he could even read pagan literature through the Christ-event. Therefore, Paul knew that (1) quoting Torah would not be the best method of communication since the Athenians had no regard for Judaism’s holy writ. (2) There is truthfulness in the world and it is God’s truthfulness. Therefore, Paul could use it to communicate the gospel to an audience who could understand basic concepts found in their own culture.

²⁹ γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἔνθυμσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον.

Therefore, being descendents of God we ought not to consider the Deity to be like gold or silver or stone formed crafts and the imagination of men.

Elsewhere, Paul wrote that “we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one (1 Cor. 8:6).” Idols are nothing but gold, silver, or stone. Deity is something other than that. According to Paul, idolatry is ignorant because it refuses to acknowledge the best “image” God has provided for us—fellow humans! If humans came from a Living Being why would we imagine (ἐνθυμσεως) the Living Being as lifeless?

³⁰ τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντα πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν,

Indeed, therefore the times of ignorance God overlooked; now He commands that all men everywhere repent.

²⁷ Bruce, 338-339.

Any reading of this statement that suggests that God has excused the sinful behavior of pagans born prior to the coming of Christ is an incorrect reading of the text. This text presents an eschatologically inspired proclamation, namely that judgment is coming! The gospel that the Apostle Paul preached was “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” but it was accompanied by the announcement that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:16, 18; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18). One may hear the good news of salvation while another may hear a terrifying prediction of judgment.

The “time of ignorance” (χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας) is those many years where the Gentiles received no announcement from the true God whose saving act was limited to His people, Israel, and those who would come to know God through Israel. There has been much discussion regarding people who never have the opportunity to hear the gospel. It is suggested that this somehow nullifies the penalty of sin because the opportunity to repent was never granted. It appears that the author of this text understands ἀγνοίας to function not as an excuse for sinfulness but rather merely the opposite of hearing the gospel. In other words, if one does hear the gospel this is a *privilege* granted by God that was not deserved.

The gospel-proclamation functions as a call to repentance for pagans who were once allowed to die without hope. The irony of this text is that when God “overlooks” He is not only *not punishing*, but He is also *not offering salvation*. In contrast, when God calls people to repent (μετανοεῖν) He is not only *demanding a turn from sin*, but He is extending salvation!

³¹ καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ἣ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὤρισεν, πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

Because He has established a day in which he is about to judge the inhabited world in righteousness, in a man who He has appointed, giving a trustworthy proof to all people by raising him from the dead!”

It has been wrongly suggested by other exegetes that Paul's preaching does not match that of Rom. 1 because he tries to proclaim human wisdom rather than preaching Christ. This is a mistaken reading of this text. (1) The author *already established that Paul was preaching Christ* in v. 18. (2) Paul mentions the man through whom God is going to *judge the world!*

ἐν ἀνδρὶ while not explicitly referring to the Incarnation does imply it to some extent. God will judge the world in a man. Therefore, the author is saying that God will judge in Christ.

The global sovereignty of God is reestablished here with the announcement that God will judge the whole of the inhabited world (τὴν οἰκουμένην). This emphasis on judgment further supports that the difference between now and the "times of ignorance" is not that God is excusing the behaviors of pagans in prior ages, but rather that *in the gospel God has begun judging the world*. Good news has come; judgment has come.

The doctrine of the resurrection is a central element to gospel proclamation (e.g. Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Cor 15:1-4). As aforementioned it is the doctrine that divides the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1-11. It is therefore evident that the resurrection is a *non-negotiable*. Paul would rather his audience turn against him than leave the resurrection out of his proclamation!

³² Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν οἱ μὲν ἐχλεύαζον, οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· ἀκουσόμεθά σου περὶ τούτου καὶ πάλιν.

Now hearing of the raising of the dead these ones on the one hand mocked; these ones on the other hand said, "We will listen to you about this thing also again".

Aeschylus wrote, "But when the dust drained the blood of man, once he is slain, there is no resurrection ()."²⁸ As Bock notes, once "Paul mentions the resurrection, the speech comes to a halt."²⁹ It appears that the resurrection is the *one idea* that the Athenian

²⁸ Conzelmann, 146.

²⁹ Bock, 558.

minds cannot comprehend. Earlier, these same people thought ἀνάστασιν was a female deity. Now that “resurrection” is being explained as God raising a man from the dead the Athenians cannot bare to hear Paul any longer. The dismissal of Paul at this point has been read by some as a rude casting away and by others as a more polite attempt to end a conversation that is perceived as being useless.

At the beginning and end of this section of narrative Paul is being mocked. Yet he stands fast and proclaims what is essential for all people to know. Namely, God has raised Jesus from the dead and God is now preparing to judge the world.

³³ οὕτως ὁ Παῦλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν.

Thus Paul went out from the midst of them.

At this point Paul leaves his audience. Again, likely explains Paul’s position amongst the people, not necessarily the location. This part of the narrative has concluded.

³⁴ τινὲς δὲ ἄνδρες κολληθέντες αὐτῷ ἐπίστευσαν, ἐν οἷς καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης καὶ γυνὴ ὀνόματι Δάμαρις καὶ ἕτεροι σὺν αὐτοῖς.

Now some men following him believed, among which was also Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damariz and others with them.

Although the narratives appears to suggest that the Apostle’s homily was unsuccessful in convincing his audience concerning Christ this was not so. The author ends with a summary statement: there were some who believed including one from the Areopagite audience and a woman named Damariz. Damariz must have been a woman who had a good reputation for her to be singled out.

Excursus (Acts 18:1; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Did Paul fail? There are some who suggest that his sudden departure to Corinth in 18:1 accompanied by his own account of how he went about proclaiming Christ to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 suggest that Paul saw Athens as a failed mission. We will suggest two things: (1) 1 Cor. 2:4 *may have* Athens in mind but it is more likely Paul has the Corinthians in mind. In other words, he is not juxtaposing the success of his mission in Corinth to the lack thereof in Athens. Rather, as Fitzmyer notes, “Corinth, or rather Neocorinth, came to outshine Athens and had become politically more important in the eastern Mediterranean world. The Roman poet Horace speaks of “vacuas Athenas” (*Epist.* 2.2.81), empty Athens.”³⁰ Paul’s polemic in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 is against the Corinthians own egotism, not against Athens (see 1 Cor. 1:18-31; 2:6-3:6 for context).

(2) According to Acts 17:15 Silas and Timothy were on their way to meet Paul. Paul was waiting for them in Athens. It appears that Paul was actually destined for Corinth, not Athens. Therefore, Paul quickly moving on to Corinth after the Areopagus encounter was not him fleeing in embarrassment but rather his desire to meet up with his companions in Corinth (see 18:5).

We conclude with v. 34 that the homily was a success. One convert to Christianity would have made it a success. Furthermore, Eusebius reported, “on the authority of a later Dionysius (bishop of Corinth c. A.D. 170)...that Dionysius the Areopagite became the first bishop of Athens”.³¹ It appears that the author frames it as a success. So even *if* Paul did not see it that way it appears that Luke did. So did the Holy Spirit.

³⁰ Fitzmyer, 601.

³¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.11; 4.23.3 cited in Bruce, 343.

Summary and Conclusion

The Apostle Paul was not afraid to meet Greco-Roman paganism at the point of truth. Although he does not quote from the Torah he proclaims the meta-narrative provided by the Torah. Furthermore, he proclaims Christ and the resurrection, hence the gospel.

In order to make this proclamation Paul will recognize the truth already inherent within the culture. Yet he will critique the culture as well. He is not afraid to point out the fallacies related to temples and idols.

That Paul was rejected does not equate to Paul failing. In fact, there were some that did not reject what Paul said. Therefore, this was successful. Paul's critique of the world's wisdom stands. But where Paul uses the "world's wisdom" he sees it as God's wisdom gracefully found in the midst of the world's wisdom. Yet his preaching is not an apologetic, per se. Paul preaches the gospel to the Athenians and he never relaxes the message—"that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3b-4)."

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