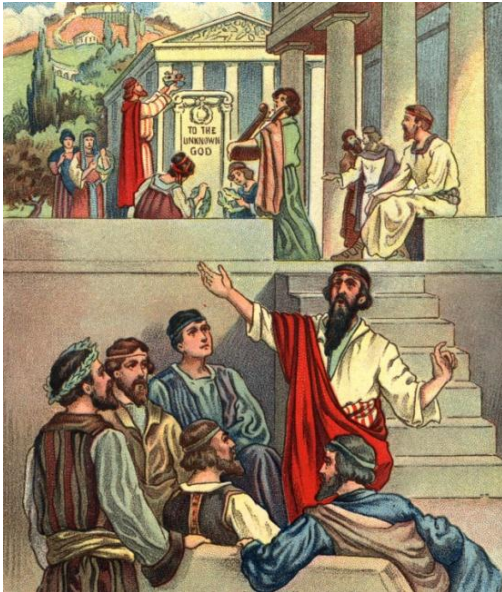


SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 9



PAUL AT ATHENS

Scripture Text: Acts 17:16-34

For safety from persecuting Jews, the brethren had brought Paul from Berea to Athens, where he waited for Silas and Timothy to join him. This city was the chief seat of Grecian learning and civilization during the golden period of the history of Greece. Plato and Aristotle had lived and taught at Athens. The atmosphere of learning developed a people who desired to understand everything through human reasoning. To hear or tell some new thing became their purpose in life. This led to a shallow spiritual condition.

The idolatry in Athens caused Paul to be burdened, and he was ready to preach the Gospel to all who would listen. The philosophers asked Paul to speak to them of his doctrine. Paul spoke on "The Unknown God." Some believed.

MEMORY VERSE: *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*

—Acts 17:24

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—**John 4:19-26** Worship God in Spirit and Truth.

Tue.—**Matthew 15:1-9** Vain worship.

Wed.—**Acts 24:1-16** Worship through belief.

Thu.—**Revelation 22:6-12** Angels not to be worshiped.

Fri.—**Romans 1:18-26** Worship that leads to servitude.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 22:22-31 Sing gratitude to God.

What Do These Strange Things Mean?

Acts 17:16-21 Paul waited, but he could not wait for long. He saw Athens **wholly given to idolatry** and **his spirit was stirred in him**—he had a burden to change it. It was the stirring of the Holy Spirit. **Therefore**—because of the stir—he disputed **with the Jews and devout persons** and any who cared to meet with him. These shallow-minded philosophers were interested in the newness of Paul's message rather than its trueness. Jesus they supposed to be another god, one unknown to them but on the same level as their idols. With little or no feeling of need, but only a desire to satisfy their pride of keeping up on knowledge, they invited Paul to speak to them concerning **this new doctrine** that was strange to them. They wanted to know **what these things mean**. The message of Jesus and the Resurrection sounds strange in our modern day to those who have only a fleshly mind and nothing in the heart pertaining to true worship. Jesus is still an unknown god to the many idol worshipers of our land. Paul **preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection**. This is the message for the idolatry in our cities and was Paul's one subject.

Because Paul's spirit had tasted of the goodness of God, it was stirred at the sight of wickedness. Since Paul held God supreme, he could not bear to see idols usurping God's place. Does wickedness stir us? Can we listen indifferently to insult God and His Word? Does the spread of sin and idolatry in our land give us pain?

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LESSON 9

Paul Begins His Sermon

Acts 17:22-25 Ye are too superstitious. They trusted in false powers and useless practices. Paul used as an introduction an inscription on a local altar, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**, put there perhaps by those fearing the wrath of some neglected deity.

Uncivilized people receive the Gospel more readily than highly civilized ones. Athens' culture was her curse. It gave her a sense of self-sufficiency. History shows that when education, culture, science, and machinery enter a country ahead of the Bible, the hearts of the people lose in simplicity and become hardened to the Gospel. The greatest kindness we can show any people is to introduce them to the Truth of God's Word at our first opportunity.

God is a Spirit and **dwelleth not in temples made with hands**. The gifts He wants are not material things. The treasures He craves are **a broken and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17)** and **a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4)**. **The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him (Psalm 147:11)**. He desires the sacrifice of praise and thanks. **O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Psalm 96:9)**.

When will mankind learn that God is not worshiped with things we can see and touch? To offer God things; to build buildings; to set up images, shrines and candles; to wear pins, crosses, or medals; to keep days; to go through ceremonies; to join organizations; to say words—these are not worship. Read **Matthew 4:10; Matthew 15:8-9**. One sin of idolatry is in belittling God to the littleness of things we can make and acts we can do. True worship is to the true and living God and from the heart. All else is idolatry.

God's Mighty Power

Acts 17:26-29 God made of one blood all nations. All people are brothers physically and in nature. There was but one creation of people. God made Adam, and all descended from him. Also, man is not related to the animal creation (**1 Corinthians 15:39**). God **hath determined the times**. He planned the dispensations, the time of the Law, the time for Christ to come, the time for the Judgment, and so it will be. He has set **the bonds of man's habitation**—where he is to live, and how long, and his powers. It is all to the end that men **should seek and find the Lord**. The Godhead cannot be likened **unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device**. He is the Supreme Being, and we are His offspring.

Repentance and the Judgment

Acts 17:30-34 The times of this ignorance God winked at—He looked over idolatry when the people were ignorant, before the Gospel was proclaimed. **But now**—now Christ has come and died and risen. Now God **commandeth . . . to repent**—to turn from idolatries and all sins. Why? **Because he hath appointed a day**, in which **he will judge the world**. How? **In righteousness**. Nothing will be hidden. No one will get by with wrong. All will be judged justly by Jesus Christ. Christ is now our Mediator, and then He will be our Judge.

Oh, how the people needed these Truths! Oh, how they needed Christ! They listened until Paul spoke of the Resurrection. Then they drew back. **Some mocked and others said, We will hear thee again**. Their unbelief shut the door to true knowledge, not in the head, but in the heart. Some believed and entered the ranks of the redeemed. Two are named: Dionysius and Damaris.

JUST A THOUGHT

**When someone says he doesn't feel as near to God as he once did,
you can be sure which one has moved.**

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.

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