



HomeGroup **LEADER** Discussion Questions
Week 6: Oct 17-23

PICK 2-3 QUESTIONS FROM THOSE LISTED BELOW THAT YOU THINK WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL FOR YOUR DISCUSSION.

As a special note, Pastor Tom uses a couple terms to describe the culture of Athens that may (or may not) be helpful to define in simple terms for your group:

Pluralistic: a culture with multiple, diverse religious options or belief systems

Syncretistic: a culture that blends multiple, diverse religious beliefs together

Idolatrous: a culture that worships false gods in place of the one true God

What stirs you up to take action? Maybe you're bothered by a need and can't help but address it. Maybe you're excited about an opportunity and can't help but seize it. This week, we're seeing how simply observing a culture and its ways can stir up a Spirit-filled man to open his mouth—both to address a great need and seize a God-given opportunity to share the gospel message.

MAIN TEXT: Acts 17:16-34

CONNECT

1. How was this past week for you? What was the highlight?
2. What stood out to you about the sermon this week?

LEARN

3. In verse 16, what stirred up Paul to take action, or, as the text says, what "provoked" his spirit?

He was provoked (we could also say, "irritated" or "angry") by the idolatry in Athens. At least in some parts of the city, idols representing various gods lined the streets.

4. Pastor Tom explained some of the values, beliefs, and practices of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. How do these compare or contrast with the gospel?

Tom explains that the Epicureans advocated pleasure at all costs and the avoidance of pain. It was a motto of "get all you can." The Stoics believed self-mastery was the highest aim of life. It was a more measured, calculated form of the same motto, "get all you can."

The gospel message is that this world cannot bring ultimate pleasure or satisfaction, which are found only in Christ and His coming Kingdom. We don't live for the moment or look to self mastery as our hope because our hope is in Christ and what He has already accomplished for us.

5. Pastor Tom points out how Paul's message before the Areopagus (vv. 22-31) doesn't make any direct reference to the OT Scriptures. Even so, what do you see in Paul's words that reveal the truth of the gospel?

Verses 24-31 contain the heart of Paul's claims about God and the gospel. Tom places emphasis on key phrases from these verses during the sermon.

6. Think back to Pastor Thomas' sermon a few weeks ago from Acts 14 when Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra. How was Paul's gospel message there similar to what we read about here in Athens? Why do you think this is the case?

In both cases, Paul is addressing people who are not familiar with the Jewish Scriptures. They don't have concepts or points of reference in their minds of, for example, Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets.

APPLY

7. Paul was deeply bothered by what he saw in Athens—a city "full of idols." When you look at our communities or culture today, what "provokes" your spirit within you (v. 16)? There could be many possibilities, including the "idols" of our day! Pastor Tim Keller has defined an idol as "anything more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, or identity. So idols are not bad things. They're really good things turned into ultimate things." (see <https://timothykeller.com/books/counterfeit-gods>).

This could also be an issue to pray about as a group—that we would be sufficiently bothered by the ways of our culture that are contrary to God's ways. Pray for hearts that are broken by the sin around us so that we would be stirred into action proclaiming the gospel.

8. Pastor Tom mentioned four major claims from this passage. Which of these is most significant to you and why?

- (1) When we share our faith with others in our biblically illiterate society (i.e., people aren't familiar with the Bible), we may need to tell a fuller sweep of the Bible before we get to the cross. Paul's example here in Athens and earlier in Lystra can serve as

as good examples of what it looks like to talk to people who are unfamiliar with God's Word.

(2) A cohesive, livable worldview begins with a robust theology and view of who God is. Unlike the Stoics and Epicureans, Christians should be able to live out their view of reality because it is defined by the one true God. When we give our attention first to knowing God, we can then be prepared to discover and "live and move and have our being" in the world He has made.

(3) In a pluralistic world of idols that we live in today, the gospel proclaims the exclusive sufficiency of Christ to save.

Contrary to pluralism, the gospel makes exclusive claims about things like who God is, who we are, how we come to know God, what our greatest problem is, what the solution to our greatest problem is, etc. Such a message is offensive to a pluralistic culture!

(4) Whenever we share the gospel, the results will always be mixed, but the results are always in God's hands. Some rejected Paul's message. Some were curious. Some believed.

9. Pastor Tom asked, "What would it take for us to have a greater vision of our great God?" How would you answer that?

Paul clearly has this as he is describing who God is to the Athenians. How do we nurture this kind of vision for God?

10. In last week's sermon, Paul "went in [to the synagogue], as was his custom, and...he reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (v. 2) in Thessalonica. This week, he is standing in Athens, quoting Greek authors to present the same gospel message about Jesus. What can we learn from the differences in Paul's methods?

There are a number of things you could say here, but one basic and essential point is that Paul's message was always the same (at its core it's about Jesus and the resurrection), but Paul's method changed depending on his context or setting. He knew his audience and sought to find points of connection or common ground with them, whether through the Jewish Scriptures or Greek philosophy!

For us, we must know the message of the gospel but also understand that there's no single formula for every setting when we talk to others about the gospel.