

“The Times of Ignorance God Overlooked”

Sermon Notes

➤ **Evangelism in an idolatrous culture is rarely easy, but Paul’s example for us on Mars Hill is really helpful**

**Whether you’re a Christian on mission in 1st century Athens or 21st century America...*

1. Check your heart (vv.16-18a)
2. Consider your hearers (vv.18b-21)
3. Preach the gospel to the people you actually have (vv.22-31)

4. Prepare for the response the Lord sovereignly gives (vv.32-34; 13:48; John 6:37, 44, 63-65)

Next Week: Acts 18:1-23 - “Paul Was Occupied With the Word”

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the week of June 23rd-29th

Getting Started

1. The big idea of the sermon this week (and last) is that **Evangelism in an idolatrous culture is rarely easy, but Paul's example on Mars Hill is really helpful.** Recalling the three definitions of idolatry that we considered last week (**Idolatry is when God's gifts become gods *An idol is anything that you'd sin in order to get or sin if you don't get it *When your desires become demands you have an idol on your hands*), what are some of the most venerated idols in our unbelieving culture today? What about in the church today? In 1 John 5:21, the apostle wraps up his letter to these Christ-followers with this warning: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." In what ways are churches tempted to commit idolatry in our corporate lives together?

Digging Deeper

2. Now, how about in your personal life? Using the definitions of idolatry above, what sorts of idols tend to press their way into the throne-room of your heart? What might it look like for you to experience a definitive work of mortification in this area of your life (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5)? Like Moses of old, what practical steps could you take in the power of the Spirit to begin to grind up these golden calves (Exodus 32:20)?

Open Your Bible to Acts 17:16-34...

3. In Acts 17:16, Luke tells us that: "...while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, *his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.*" There's no doubt this furnishes us with evidence that Paul's heart was healthy. If we too are Pauline, we ought to be similarly provoked in our spirits given the idolatrous conditions within which we live. However, sometimes we find that we are more like the proverbial 'frog in the kettle'. If you throw a frog into a boiling pot of water, he'll jump out immediately. But if you place him there and slowly increase the temperature over time, he'll boil to death. In what ways is it easy to be a frog in the kettle? How might we train our spirits to become more sensitive to provocation by idols?

4. Verse 17 makes it plain that Paul didn't simply sit back with disgust and become a critic of the Athenian culture in which he found himself. Instead, he entered right into the fray and began to engage with at least three different sorts of folks: idolaters in religious places of worship (v.17a), idolatry in the public square (v.17b), and idolaters who occupied positions of cultural influence and those who followed them (v.18a). What does it look like to follow Paul's pattern in our own day? How can you / we meaningfully engage with each of these categories of people?

5. Paul receives three different responses to his initial gospel proclamation in verses 18-21. Some call him names (v.18a), others misunderstand his message (v.18b), and still others are curious to learn more about his message (vv.19-21). Can you identify with Paul? Do you have any examples of such interactions with unbelievers in the context of your own personal evangelism? If so, please share with the group.

6. Read carefully through Luke's summary of Paul's message to the men of Athens at the Areopagus (vv.22-31). How does he seek to find common ground with them? What is his approach in terms of the actual content of his gospel proclamation? Why does he quote Greek poets? What truths does he clearly communicate about *God...man...Christ...* and the sincere *response* that's required of every human being to the gospel? The level of biblical literacy among 1st century Athenian philosophers in Paul's day is about that of the average 21st American today (i.e. not much). How is this sample of Paul's preaching on Mars Hill an excellent primer for us in our conversations with the folks on our 'List of 5'?

7. Luke describes three different types of reactions among Paul's hearers in verses 32-34. What are they? Have you experienced any of these types of reactions in your evangelistic engagement with unbelievers? If so, please share with the group. Though Luke merely describes the response of Paul's hearers from a human perspective...how does Luke in Acts 13:48 as well as Jesus in John 6:37, 44, and 63-65 ultimately account for people's responses to God's Word from a divine perspective?

8. Close your time as a group praying by name for the people on each of your 'Lists of 5'. Do you know each other well enough to know who's on each other's lists? We ought to aim for that level of relational care and intimacy with one another. Have you ever had the privilege of crossing someone off your list because they came to Christ? Sadly, some people get crossed off our list not because they come to Christ but because they die. Remember: the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time (Hebrews 9:27). Let's make this a season of turning to prayer - care - share (Colossians 4:2-6)!