

Paul's Areopagus Address

The Council of the Areopagus had supreme authority in religious matters, the power to appoint public lecturers, and had been for many generations (in fact, from legendary times, the most respected Athenian court).

Flattery was forbidden, sarcasm is clearly not Paul's intent here, so 'very religious' **δεισιδαμονεστερους** is to be taken simply as a statement of fact by Paul. Sophocles, Pausanias, Josephus, Strabo and Livy all describe the Athenians as religious.

The altar to the unknown God **αγνωστω θεω**. Pausanias says there were such altars in Athens. Diogenes Laertes describes in *Lives of Philosophers* how in a time of pestilence the Athenians sent for Epimenides the Cretan to advise them. He recommended the sacrifice of sheep to unknown gods, as those they worshipped had not helped them, and the setting up of altars commemorating these gods.

v.23 **ο ουν αγνοουντες ενσεβειτε, τουτο**. Paul uses the neuter here, as also in v.29 **το θειου**. Paul begins with their belief in 'the divine', an impersonal force, or essence, and then proclaims the personal God, Creator, Sustainer and Judge of all.

v.24 **ο θεος ο ποιησας τον κοσμον και παντα τα εν αυτω** similar to some words of Plato in the *Timaeus*. In v.27 Paul's words about 'feeling after God to find him' also echo words and thoughts of Plato's.

v.25 The Epicureans believed that God needs nothing from us; and the Stoics regarded God as the source of all that exists.

v.26 The Athenians believed themselves to be superior to others, especially to non-Greeks 'barbarians'. Paul teaches the unity of all men over against this.

επι παντος προσωπου This speech is full of alliteration, particularly of π. **πασ** is used frequently with other words in alliterative sequence. See verses 24, 25, 26, 30, 31. Notice also the assonance in verse 25 of **ζωην και πωην**. The style of the speech is formal and elevated, almost poetic.

v.28 **εν αυτω γαρ ζωμεν και κινουμεθα και εσμεν** comes from an address to Zeus by his son Minos:

*They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high -
the Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies!
But thou art not dead; thou art risen and alive for ever,
for in thee we live and move and have our being.*

The words are from Epimenides of Crete. This passage is also quoted in Titus 1:12, where Paul calls him a prophet.

The second quotation is from Aratus, the Silician poet, and his words are very similar to those in the *Hymn to Zeus* in your handout. Epimenides and the Stoic poets argued from the life and nature of men to the living reality of God, even

though their God is not fully personal. Paul's argument is similar, though he insists on the personal nature of God.

v.31 Notice the substitution of *ανηρ* in place of *ο υιος του ανθρωπου*.

v.32 Paul has spoken of the resurrection of the dead, and this brings sneers from some of his Athenian audience. They believed, many of them, in the immortality of the soul, but the idea of physical resurrection is new. The playwright and poet Aeschylus, in his play *The Eumenides*, has the god Apollo say:

*But once the dust drinks down a man's blood,
he is gone, once for all. No rising back, ΟΥΤΙΣ ΕΣΤ ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ
no spell sung over the grave can sing him back -
not even Father can. (sc. Zeus)*

The occasion of these words is the inauguration by Athena, the goddess of Athens, of the Areopagus court for the judging of Orestes. Now the apostle declares that God has indeed raised a man from the dead, Jesus, the Judge of all men.

(Much of this information is taken from F.F. Bruce, The Acts Of The Apostles: The Greek Text With Introduction And Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1951. Some information is from Green, Evangelism In The Early Church, and other information is from the original sources.)

