

Approaching God

Read this portion of Psalm 35 and respond to God with an opening prayer

Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to me, "I am your salvation." (Psalm 35:1-3)

Opening Prayer: "Lord, what others think of me is far too important to my heart. At times when I am being criticized unfairly, I need you send your Spirit, to fight for me, and to speak to my soul, saying, 'I am your salvation - nothing else and no one else is.' Amen."

Acts 17:16-34

Passage Introduction: Freedom for the Gentiles

Paul now finds himself in Athens, where he waits for Timothy and Silas. Luke writes, "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (v 16). Paul's soul reacts to his surroundings. He looks around the city in disgust & disbelief. There in Athens, the people had erected idols with their own hands and bowed down to them as gods. They served carved images rather than the one true God. They worshiped the creature rather than the Creator. Provoked by what he sees, Paul begins to share the gospel.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

Athens, Greece was filled with examples of artistic beauty, particularly its statues of the Greek gods and the architectural magnificence of its temples.

Acts 17:16-34 - 16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. **17** So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. **18** A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. **19** Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." **21** (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) **22** Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this

“some of your own poets.”

vs 28: Instead of the OT, Paul quoted some statements from pagan Greek writers who would be familiar to his audience. Though he quotes them with approval, this does not imply that he approves of other things that these writers said or wrote. The first quotation (in him we live ...) appears to be from a hymn to Zeus by Epimenides of Crete (600 BC) the words are found just two lines later than the quotation Paul takes from the same poem in Titus 1:12. The second quotation here is from the poem Phainomena by the Stoic poet Aratus (c. 315–240 BC)

inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. **25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. **26** From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. **27** God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’

As some of your own poets have said,
‘We are his offspring.’

29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. **30** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” **33** At that, Paul left the Council. **34** Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

The Power of Looking & Prayer Walking

“We do not speak like Paul because we do not feel like Paul because we do not see like Paul. That was the order: he saw, he felt, he spoke. It all began with his eyes. When Paul walked around Athens, he did not just ‘notice’ the idols. The Greek verb used three times (16,22,23) is either ‘heoreo’ or ‘anatheoreo’ and means... to ‘consider’. So he looked and looked, and thought, and thought, until the fires... were kindled within.”

John Stott

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- What does this passage today show me about God for which I can thank or praise him?
- What does this passage tell me about people, myself, my neighbor, or perhaps humanity in general?
- How do verses 32-34 give us a realistic and hopeful expectation of what will happen as we share the gospel?

Key Takeaway:

What truth do I most need to remember from today's passage? How would this truth change my life if I took it seriously? If this truth were fully alive and effective in your inward being? Why might God be bringing this truth to your attention today?

Close in Prayer:

1. **Rejoice:** - What did God show me today that I can **rejoice in**?
2. **Repent:** - What did God reveal that I need to confess or **repent of**?
3. **Requests:** - What prayer **requests** do I have as a result of my time with God today?