

We, the Athenians...

While the apostle Paul waited for Silas and Timothy at Athens, he had time to notice “*the city full of idols,*” Acts 17:16ff. After he engaged some of the resident *debaters* (the *Epicurean* and *Stoic* philosophers), they disdainfully called him a *scrap monger* or *scavenger*- which is the literal translation of the term rendered as “*idle babbler*” in v.18, and further described him as a “*proclaimer of strange deities,*” because he spoke of Jesus resurrected. The background of this assessment is that the Athenians worshipped, among all their other idols, dead men defied. But of this particular *deity*- the resurrected Christ, they had never heard. Their interest was, sadly, more curiosity than a search for truth and salvation.

But I fear we today have much more in common with the Athenians than we’d prefer to admit. For instance, like the Epicurean philosophy, the studied pursuit of life’s pleasures seems to have become our main objective in life, and even our go-to response to life’s sorrows and difficulties. “Go do or buy something- you’ll feel better!” is often the prescription. Even in our “spiritual” pursuits, the relative value of any purposed doctrine or religion is weighed by “how it makes me feel.” However...

The thing we seem to have most in common with the ancient Athenians is our willingness to “worship” a god of our own making. Like our arrogant brethren of the past, we boast in our “knowledge” and “spirituality” while displaying our ignorance through the worship of an otherwise *unknown god*, cf. vv.18-23. How is it that we, like the Athenians, “*worship in ignorance*”?

We have the sublime opportunity to love, serve, worship, and obey the great “I Am” - the *Creator*, *Sustainer*, and *Sovereign* of the Universe, but instead, we pay idolatrous tribute to:

- Ø **“The god of Convenience.”** This is the god we serve when it's not too difficult, troublesome, or tiring to do so. Those of the prophet Malachi’s day served this god. They said, “*My, how tiresome it is*” (to properly worship and serve God), Malachi 1:13. And we have become their brethren, along with the Athenians, when we only worship and serve God when we’re not too tired from our own pursuits, or too busy with them. We, like the Hebrew Christians of the first century, *have need of endurance, so when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised,*” Hebrews 10:36. We often claim that “God comes first in my life,” but the reality is that He only comes first when we’ve nothing better to do.
- Ø **“The god of Subjection.”** This is the god we believe as long as His way agrees with mine. But the moment His word or will is at crosses purposes with mine, it is He who is either subjected, or relegated to the bin of the irrelevant, out of date, or lacking enlightenment. Get this: There is no real subjection as long as there is agreement. If we only “subject” ourselves to God (or elders, or spouses, or parents, or government) when we agree with Him- or perhaps better, when He agrees with us, there is no real subjection at all. But when His way contradicts “my way,” and I accept, prefer, and take His way, true submission is found. Remember, “*the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so,*” Romans 8:7.
- Ø **“The god of Provision.”** This is the god we praise as long as He gives us what we think we need or want. He is a close cousin to the *god of subjection*. We are so very willing to praise Him in song, prayer, and on social media for the wonderful blessings He bestows- as long as those “blessings” include happy and healthy families, all of the latest technologies, styles, and “conveniences,” and we can thus enjoy “all that life has to offer.” But what if those “blessings” ONLY included, “*food and covering*”- would we be “*content*” with these, cf. 1Timothy 6:8? Would we be just as grateful and full of praise for His provision of these necessities, or are we just pining for the *god of provision*? Job, even after losing his *oxen, donkeys, sheep, servants, and children,* “*fell to the ground and worshipped... Blessed be the name of the Lord,*” Job 1:13-22.
- Ø **“The god of Compromise.”** This is the god we consult and celebrate when the God of the Bible puts us at odds with the thoughts, ideas, and ways of the world. When “science” or modern

concepts and determinations of morality contradict the thoughts, ways, and words of God, we discard the sacred in favor of the secular, and bow before the god of Compromise. Rejecting the notion that “*as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts*” (Isaiah 55:9), we seek to rationalize the Word of God, and thereby subject it to the thoughts and ways of men instead of vice versa. As Joshua told the fledgling nation of Israel long ago, we must “*choose for yourselves today whom you will serve*” (Joshua 24:15), for we surely cannot serve both the god of Compromise and the God heaven! Either God is true and every man who contradicts Him is a liar, or man is his own god and has no need of Jehovah.

So which “god” do you, or will you, serve? The god(s) of *Convenience, Subjection, Provision, or Compromise*? Or the God of the Universe? The idolatrous Athenians worshipped “*in ignorance*” a god that was *unknown* to them. Be sure you *know* the God you worship, for He is **not** a god to be served only when it is *convenient*, or one whose will and ways can be *subjected* to ours. He is to be praised when He *provides* what we want, and when He provides what we need but don’t want. He is the creator of heaven and earth and all things therein- and as such, is surely not a god to be *compromised* or contradicted. As Jesus once told Satan, “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only,*” **Matthew 4:10!** (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)