

STUDY NOTES

The Acts of the Apostles

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH (Spring 2016)

WWW.NEWCITYPHX.COM/SERMONS - CHRIS TOWNLEY

The following content is based on the message “The Unknown God” spoken on 06/12/16 by Chris Townley at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis of the message but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective communities.

THE SCRIPTURE: ACTS 17:16-34

PAUL TOURS ATHENS

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. ¹⁷He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there. ¹⁸He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, “What’s this babbling trying to say with these strange ideas he’s picked up?” Others said, “He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.” ¹⁹Then they took him to the high council of the city. “Come and tell us about this new teaching,” they said. ²⁰“You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it’s all about.” ²¹(It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.) (Acts 17:16-21)

Paul connects idols with immorality and this irritates him because immorality leads to the destruction of people, relationships, futures, etc.

- Are you aware of idols in your life?
- How might your misdirected worship of such an idol hurt someone else?

PAUL SPEAKS IN ATHENS

²²So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: “Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, ²³for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about. (Acts 17:22-23)

It is not just a “thing” we idolize, but why we idolize it that identifies the source of our misdirected worship.

- What are we willing to endure, compromise, sacrifice so that others will know Christ?

GOD IS NOT FAR FROM ANY ONE OF US

²⁴He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, ²⁵and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. ²⁶From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. ²⁷His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ (Acts 17:24-28)

If you are “the offspring” of this Unknown God it must mean that although you might not know God... God certainly knows you.

- How might we feel our way toward God?
- What does it mean for us and those we interact with that “God is not far from any one of us”?

PEOPLE MAKE CRUMMY GODS

²⁹And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. ³⁰God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. ³¹For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:29-31)

We’re “refined” our idolatry but we still idolize. And it turns out people make crummy gods... our spouses, kids, friends, pastors, heroes all make crummy gods. **God is the only One who can bear the weight of worship.**

As Paul speaks the the linchpin is still “Jesus is the way and the way is repentance.” And the resurrection proves the point.

- *Who or what have you placed the weight of worship on recently?*
- *How do we transfer our worship to the One True God who can sustain it (and deserves it)?*

SOME LAUGH, SOME WANT MORE

³²When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, “We want to hear more about this later.” ³³That ended Paul’s discussion with them, ³⁴but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. (Acts 17:32-34)

Telling others about the Good News means we might get laughed at but it also means we might have the opportunity to form a relationship for more.

We want a good debate without having to change the way we live. So, like Paul, we must walk around our own lives and identify the idols... the false gods that lead us away from Jesus.

- *Have you ever been laughed at when telling someone about Jesus?*
- *Why do you think we tend like a debate without any life change? Do you think can have a good debate that does lead to life change?*
- *What do you think God is saying to you through the account of Paul in Athens in Acts 17?*