

Notes on Paul's Sermon to the Greek Intellectuals

Stoicism: "The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul's day. Although most people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated."⁴⁹ Founded by Zeno (circa 336-263 BC) who taught in the Painted Porch (Stoa) in Athens. Opposed to pleasure (as the focus and purpose of life), the Stoics believed that:

"Pervading the whole of the material order was Reason and Purpose, itself divine and indeed the only god the Stoics recognized... Man's duty was to live in accordance with this Reason or Natural Law; indeed a spark or seed of the universal Reason resided within men, or at least within the best and wisest of them."⁵⁰

Stoics believed in only the god of Reason, but allowed for a belief in popularly recognized (worshiped) gods. Zeno wrote: "It is reasonable to honour the gods; but it is not reasonable to honour beings which do not exist: therefore gods exist."⁵¹ Some philosophers among the Stoics questioned the old traditions (belief in gods), while allowing belief in the gods for the masses. "Stoics believed that god permeated all things and therefore was not localized in temples."⁵² They also held that god needs nothing just as the Greek-speaking Jews believed (see Acts 17:25). "Stoics believed that the universe periodically dissolved back into God... [and they] believed that the soul lived on after death (although, like everything else, it was eventually absorbed back into God), but like other Greeks they could not conceive of a resurrection of the body."⁵³ The four tenets⁵⁴ of modern Stoicism are:

Tenet one: We recognize the existence of intelligible order in the universe, and we call that order the Logos.

Tenet two: We acknowledge that Nature is One, a dynamic continuum uniting the Logos and matter.

Tenet three: Nature has endowed us with the faculty of reason, the power of choice, and the capacity for love.

Tenet four: A Stoic chooses to live by the Four Cardinal Virtues: Wisdom, Justice, Courage, and Decorum.

Epicureans: "A philosophical school [founded by Epicurus, circa 342-270 BC] that valued pleasure (the absence of pain and disturbance) and disbelieved in the gods of ancient myths."⁵⁵ Though somewhat contradictory, Keener also says "Epicureans were influential only in the educated upper classes [of Greek society], and their views about God were similar to deism (he was uninvolved in the universe and irrelevant). If there were gods, they were only those known through sense knowledge, like stars or planets. Life's goal was pleasure—the lack of physical pain and emotional disturbance."⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Op. cit, Keener, page 831.

⁵⁰ *The New Testament Background: Writings from Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire That Illuminate Christian Origins*, Edited by C. K. Barrett, Harper Collins Publisher, San Francisco, 1989, page 65.

⁵¹ Op. cit, Barrett, page 67.

⁵² Op. cit, Keener, page 374.

⁵³ Op. cit, Keener, page 374.

⁵⁴ First Stoic Council (1999), see <http://members.aol.com/cyberstoic/intro.html>.

⁵⁵ Op. cit, Keener, page 824.

⁵⁶ Op. cit., Keener, page 372.

“Epicurus, though often called an atheist. Did not deny the existence of gods, but taught that as they are beings who themselves enjoy continual bliss they will never cause harm or suffering to men; there is nothing to fear from them, but neither can they be placated or cajoled—if they listened to all the prayers men offer the whole race would come to an end, so foolish and contradictory are the petitions they would hear.”⁵⁷

Paul would have had little in common with Epicureans, according to Keener, because they denied the soul’s immortality and believed the soul was material, like the body, and died with the body.⁵⁸ Epicurus proposed four medicinal herbs (or tenets):⁵⁹

Tenet one: The gods are not to be feared.

Tenet two: Death is nothing to worry about.

Tenet three: Good is easy to attain.

Tenet four: The fearful is easy to endure.”

Areopagus: The council in Athens, at Paul’s time probably not the site earlier used for this council (literally the hill of Areas). Some scholars have suggested that the Council may have been an accrediting board that tested lecturers. Socrates was also brought before the Areopagus (which provoked his listeners to martyr him). The Areopagus was for those of highest status in the university community. Women would not have been allowed to meet in or with the Council.

Note: For Biblical pronunciations, check out <http://netministries.org/bbasics/bbasics.html>.

⁵⁷ Op. cit, Barrett, page 78.

⁵⁸ Op. cit, Keener, page 374.

⁵⁹ See <http://www.arthurchappell.clara.net/greek.precursors.htm>.

Beliefs Concerning:	Stoics	Epicureans	Paul's Sermons/Community of Christ
God	Intelligent order in universe, called Logos (ἔϋἄἰῶ) or Reason & Purpose ⁶⁰	Disbelief in ancient gods	
Life's Goal	Live by Wisdom, Justice, Courage & decorum	Pleasure, the absence of physical pain & emotional disturbance	Turn to God in repentance, have faith in Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21)
Nature of God	Universe periodically dissolved back into god. God needs nothing, if god exists, not localized	Not to be feared, uninvolved in universe & irrelevant	Does not live in temples, not served by human hands (Acts 17:24-25)
Death & the Afterlife	Could not conceive of resurrection of body, but soul lives on	Not to be feared, no immortality. "death is privation of sensation." ⁶¹	Raised Jesus (the man who judges) from the dead (Acts 17:31)
Nature	A dynamic continuum united Logos & matter	Soul & body are material and die	
Nature of Man/Woman	Endowed with faculty of reason, power of choice, capacity for love	Should seek pleasure, that is, the absence of pain and anxiety	For in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)
Prayer	In Paul's day, popularized version prayed to many gods.	Gods cannot be cajoled	
Religion		Fosters fear of gods, demons, death & pain	Community must be watchful (Acts 20-29-30), will build you up (Acts 20:32)
Founded by:	Zeno (336-263 BC) Founded approx. 302 BCE	Epicurus (342-270 BC)	Jesus (4 BCE-30 CE) Paul (died 2--63 or 67 CE)

⁶⁰ Same Greek word (ἔϋἄἰῶ) as used for the "Word" in John 1:1.

⁶¹ Op. cit, Barrett, page 79.