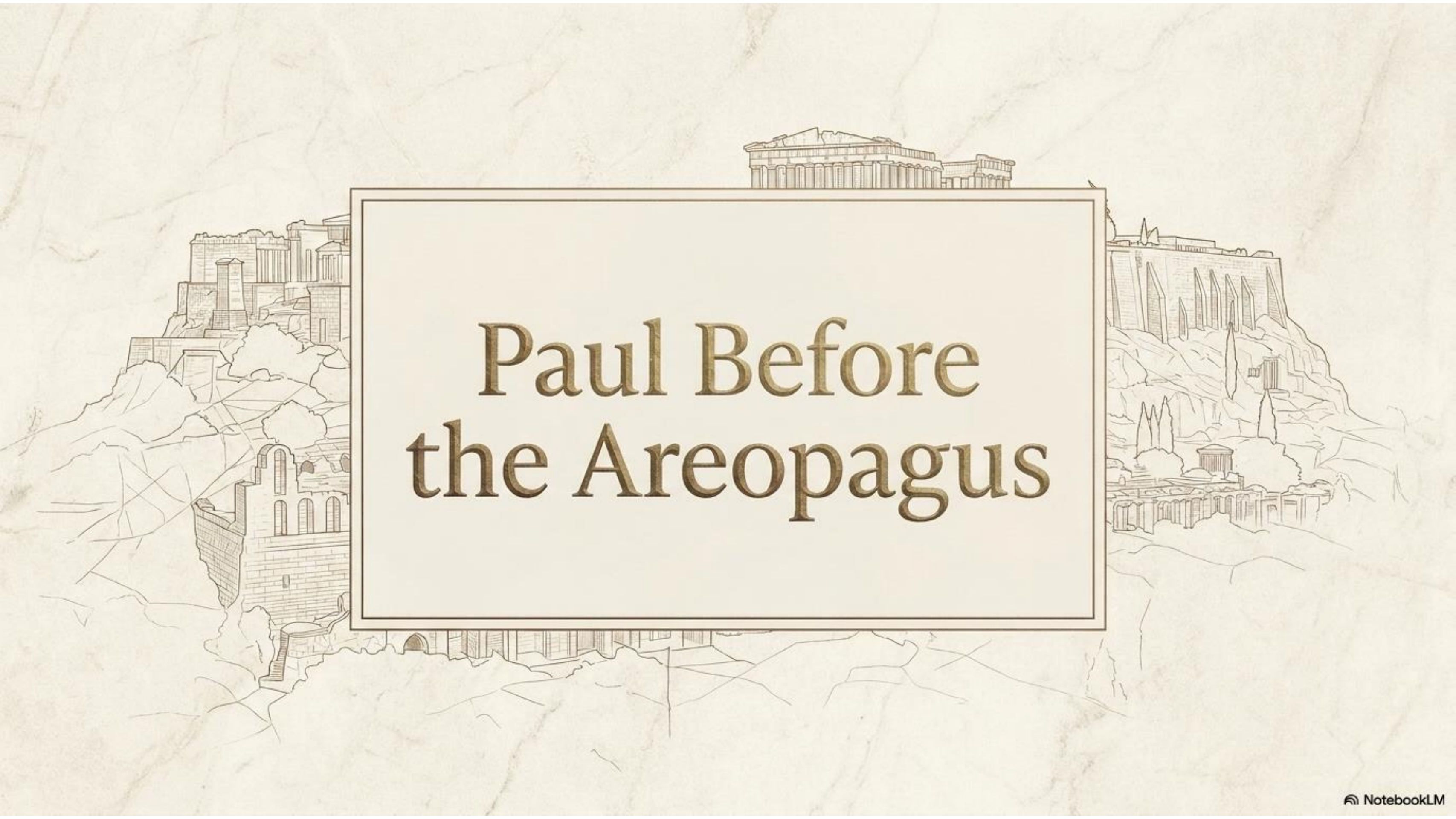


The background is a detailed line drawing of ancient Athens. At the top center is the Parthenon on the Acropolis. To the left, a hillside is covered with various ancient buildings and structures. To the right, a steep cliff features several tall, narrow columns. In the foreground, there are more classical buildings and a large open area. The entire scene is rendered in a light brown, sketch-like style.

Paul Before the Areopagus

Paul enters an intellectual climate defined by a relentless love of knowledge and entrenched philosophical camps.

The Athenian Climate

The Athenian love of knowledge was widely known (Acts 17:21-22). Paul's challenge in the Agora was not merely religious, but deeply philosophical, requiring him to navigate two dominant, deeply entrenched worldviews.



The Epicureans

Seekers of the happy life through the active removal of obstacles.



The Stoics

Adherents of divine order and internal determinism.

Two dominant philosophies controlled the Athenian framework for life, death, and the divine.

Theological Concept	The Epicureans (Est. 307 BC)	The Stoics (Est. 320 BC)
Foundational Principle	The removal of obstacles to a happy life; controlling inevitable pain; the absence of pessimism. 	The world is one huge continuum; recurrent cycles of fire with one primeval controlling fire. 
View of the Divine	All things explained without recourse to divine providence, superstition, or the appeasement of gods. 	All things develop from a seed internally; fragments of divinity exist within. 
View of Fate & Death	The fear of death is unnecessary because man is fundamentally made up of atoms only. 	Strong adherents to determinism; strict doctrines of necessity, fate, and the certainty of the future. 

Physical idols reveal an innate, yet fallen, human desire for dependence on the divine.

Innate Desire

The presence of idols proves a profound desire for worship. It demonstrates a human proclivity for dependence on something outside and greater than oneself.



Admission of Fallenness

The internal idea of “something greater” acts as a profound admission of human incompleteness and fallenness.

Diagnostic Observation (Acts 17:16, 22)

Paul is infuriated. He sees they are seeking, yet remain so far away. False worship fundamentally bothers him.

Paul captures goodwill using a calculated, ambiguous compliment regarding their devotion.

Δεισδαίμονες τέρους

Acts 17:22

The Positive Angle

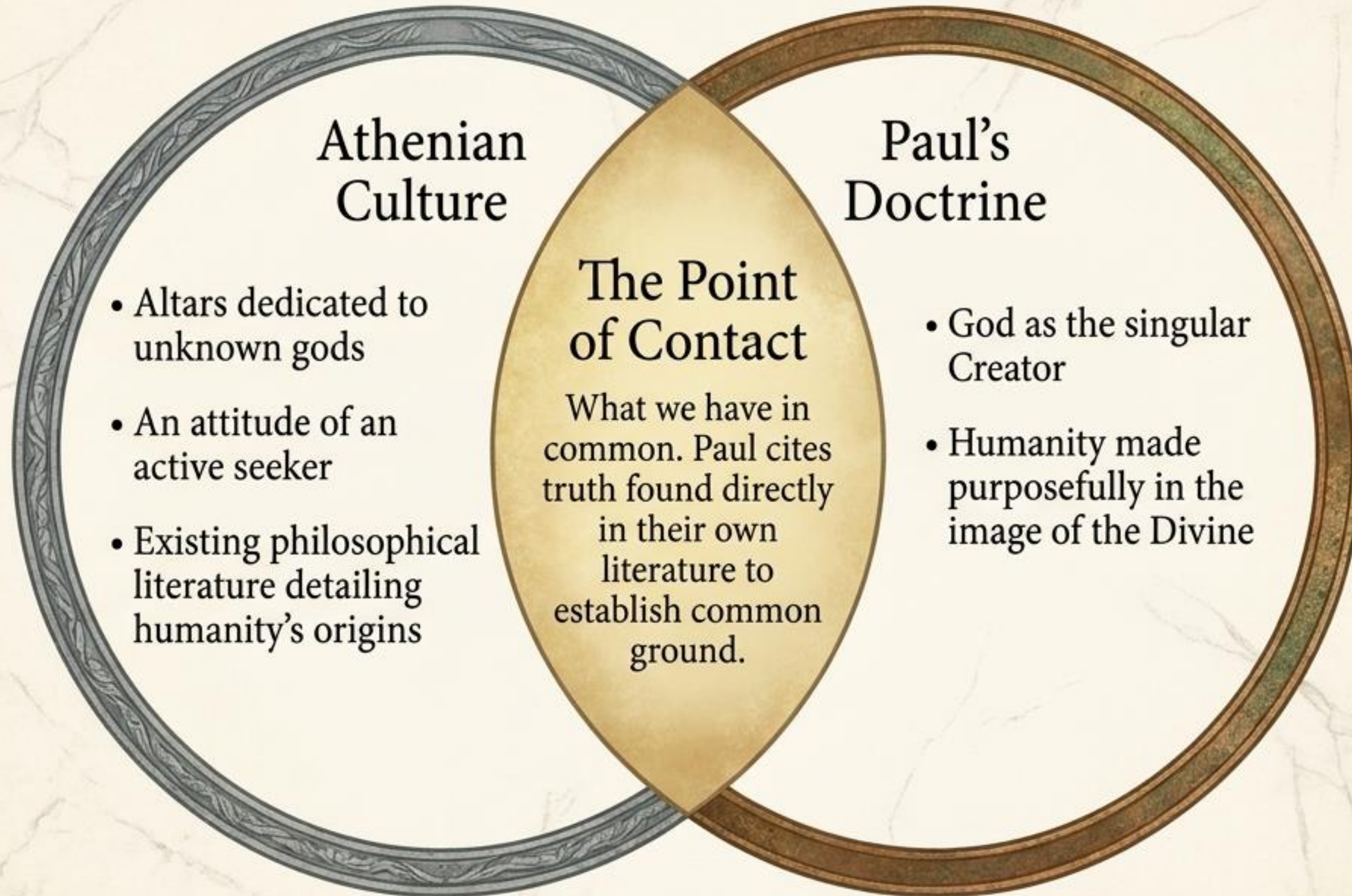
Translated as "Devout." This functions as a captatio (the technical rhetorical term for a laudatory introduction). He acknowledges their genuine devotion to an object of worship.

The Negative Angle

Translated as "Superstitious." A subtle critique embedded within the compliment, highlighting the fractured and incomplete nature of their idol worship.

The Rhetorical Hook: This backhanded compliment plays on ambiguity, allowing Paul to critique their system while simultaneously earning the right to be heard.

Cultural competence and doctrinal astuteness intersect at the “Unknown God.”

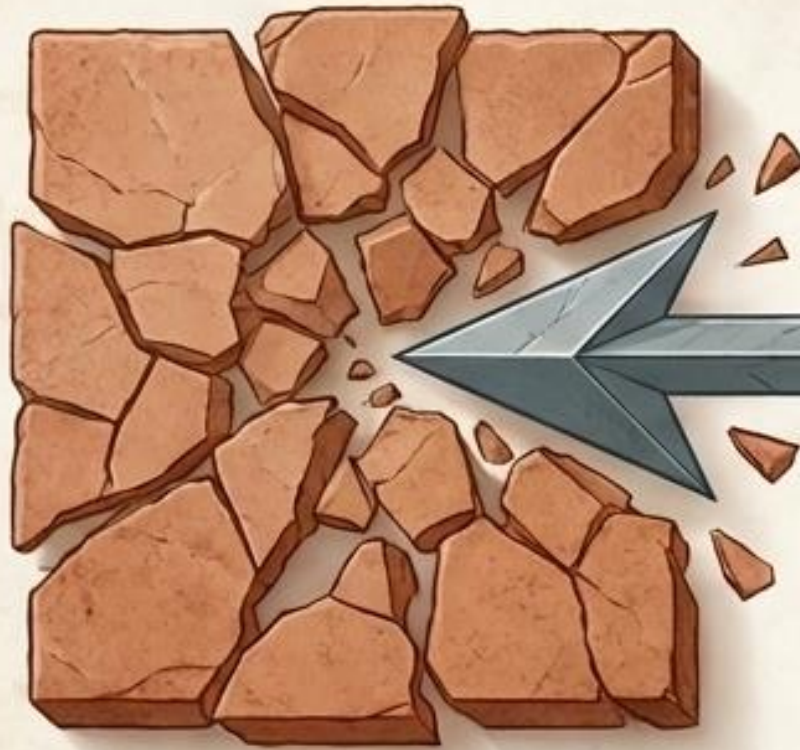


A non-technical Gospel presentation strategically shatters the prevailing philosophies.

Acts 17:24-31

Striking the Epicureans

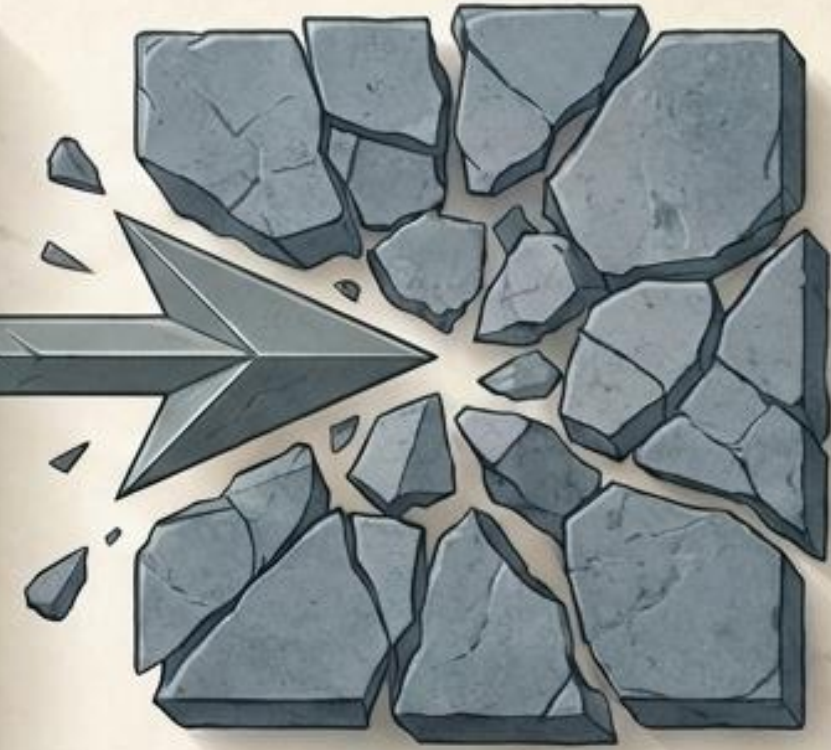
Counters Materialism. God is not distant; He created man as His offspring for the express purpose of finding Him, refuting the idea of mere atoms and lack of divine providence.



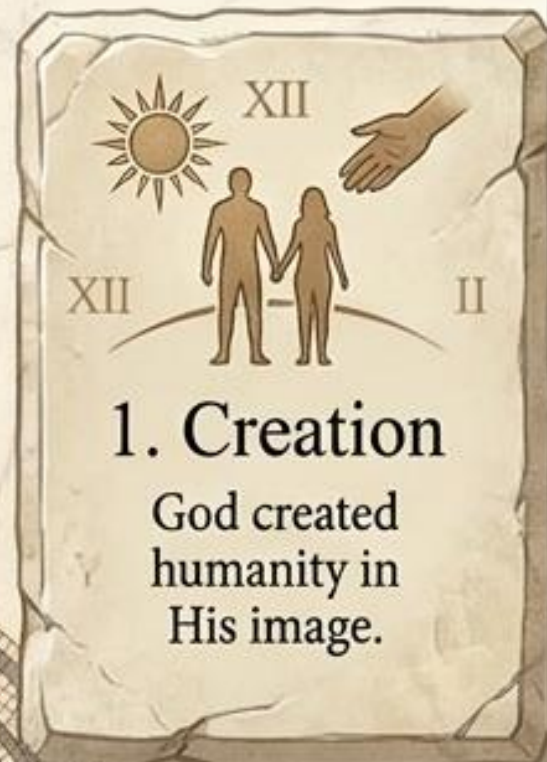
Paul's Doctrine
God is the Creator of
the world and utterly
independent of
humanity.

Striking the Stoics

Counters Pantheism. Because God created us in His image, He cannot be conjured up in our imaginations or contained within a recurrent material continuum.



The argument escalates from the patience of the Creator to the demand of the Judge.



The Resurrection acts as a historical inflection point that unites and separates all men.

Acts 17:32-34

The Proof

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul does not debate Christianity as a valid belief system back and forth; he assumes its truth and uses this as definitive proof.



Unites

Those who believe and yield to the resurrected Son of the Father.

Separates

Those who mock, dismiss, or delay.

The Ultimate Question:
What will you do with Jesus Christ as the resurrected Son?

The Areopagus encounter provides a paradigm for cultural engagement in a pluralistic society.



1. Observe

Diagnose the culture. Recognize false worship not merely as error, but as an innate, fallen desire for the Divine that should break our hearts.



2. Connect

Find the "Unknown God." Leverage cultural competence to build bridges using their own literature, values, and vocabulary.



3. Contrast

Apply doctrinal astuteness. Present God accurately in ways that surgically dismantle the specific false philosophies of the audience.



4. Confront

Drive to the inflection point. Do not endlessly debate systems; demand a response to the historical reality of the Resurrection.