

~EPICUREANS (92) (Ep-i-cu-re'ans)

- The followers of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, 341-270 B.C.E. The philosophy originated by Epicurus flourished for seven centuries. It centered around the idea that the pleasure of the individual was the sole or chief good in life.
- Hence, **Epicurus** advocated living in such a way as to derive the greatest amount of pleasure possible during one's lifetime, yet doing so moderately in order to avoid the suffering incurred by overindulgence in such pleasure.
- The emphasis was placed on pleasures of the mind rather than on physical pleasures. Therefore, according to **Epicurus**, with **whom** a person eats is of greater importance than **what** is eaten. Unnecessary and, especially, artificially produced desires were to be suppressed. Since learning, culture, and civilization as well as social and political involvements could give rise to desires that are difficult to satisfy and thus result in disturbing one's peace of mind, they were discouraged.
- Knowledge was sought only to rid oneself of religious fears and superstitions, the two primary fears to be eliminated being fear of the gods and of death. Viewing marriage and what attends it as a threat to one's peace of mind, **Epicurus** lived a celibate life but did not impose this restriction on his followers.
- The philosophy was characterized by a complete absence of principle. Lawbreaking was counseled against simply because of the shame associated with detection and the punishment it might bring. Living in fear of being found out or punished would take away from pleasure, and this made even secret wrongdoing inadvisable.
- To the **Epicureans**, virtue in itself had no value and was beneficial only when it served as a means to gain happiness. Reciprocity was recommended, not because it was right and noble, but because it paid off.
- Friendships rested on the same selfish basis, that is, the pleasure resulting to the possessor. While the pursuit of pleasure formed the focal point of the philosophy, paradoxically Epicurus referred to life as a bitter gift.

- The **Epicureans** believed in the existence of gods, but that they, just like everything else, were made of atoms, though of finer texture. It was thought that the gods were too far away from the earth to have any interest in what man was doing, so it did not do any good to pray or to sacrifice to them.
- The gods, they believed, did not create the universe, nor did they inflict punishment or bestow blessings on anyone, but they were supremely happy, and this was the goal to strive for during one's life.
- However, the **Epicureans** contended that the gods were in no position to aid anyone in this, that life came into existence by accident in a mechanical universe, and that death ends everything, liberating the individual from the nightmare of life.
- Although it was believed that man has a soul, the soul was thought to be composed of atoms that dissolve at the death of the body, just as water spills out of a pitcher that breaks.
- In the light of the foregoing, it can well be appreciated why Epicurean philosophers were among those who took to conversing controversially with Paul in the marketplace at Athens and who said, What is it this chatterer would like to tell? He seems to be a publisher of foreign deities.
- Consequently he began to reason in the synagogue with the Jews and the other people who worshiped God and every day in the marketplace with those who happened to be on hand. (**Acts of Apostles 17:17**)
- But certain ones of both the Epicurean and the Stoic philosophers took to conversing with him controversially, and some would say; What is it this chatterer would like to tell? Others; He seems to be a publisher of foreign deities. This was because he was declaring the Good News of Jesus and the resurrection. (**Acts of Apostles 17:18**)
- The philosophy of the **Epicureans**, with its idea of let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to die, denied the resurrection hope taught by Christians in their ministry.
- If, like men, I have fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, of what good is it to me? If the dead are not to be raised up, let us eat

and drink, for tomorrow we are to die. (**1 Corinthians 15:32**)