

## Paul on Mars' Hill (Acts 17:16-34)

- I. This study should accomplish 4 primary things:
  1. Show that many times God's people are no different from the heathen.
  2. Observe and relate to the nature and thinking of unconverted men.
  3. Demonstrate how to successfully preach the gospel to heathen, unchurched men.
  4. Demonstrate how preaching the gospel will sort out men and reveal what manner of spirit they are.
  
- II. God's people are often times no different than the heathen (v. 16-17).
  1. Prior to Paul arriving in Athens, he had spent time preaching the gospel in Thessalonica and then in Berea, both of which the Jews stirred up the people and ran him out (Act 17:1-15).
  2. When Paul got to Athens, he found the city *wholly* given to idolatry (Act 17:16).
  3. Wholly - 1. As a whole, in its entirety, in full, throughout, all of it; formerly also (in ref. to a pl. or collect. n.), all of them, all together, in a body.
    - A. This caused his spirit to be *stirred* in him (v. 16).
      - i. Stirred - 1. Moved, agitated, excited, etc.
      - ii. Excited - 1. a. Stirred by strong emotion, disturbed, agitated.
      - iii. Disturbed - 1. Disquieted; agitated; having the settled state, order, or position interfered with.
      - iv. Agitated - 1. Moved, set in motion.
    - B. Seeing people (especially God's people) practicing idolatry and not keeping God's law should cause us to be stirred and grieved (Psa 119:53, 136, 158; Eze 9:4).
      - i. Horror - 1. a. Roughness, ruggedness. 2. a. A shuddering or shivering; now esp. (Med.) as a symptom of disease. 3. a. A painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear; a shuddering with terror and repugnance; strong aversion mingled with dread; the feeling excited by something shocking or frightful. Also in weaker sense, intense dislike or repugnance. (The prevalent use at all times.)
      - ii. Grieved - 1. Harassed, troubled, oppressed.
  4. *Therefore* Paul disputed with three classes of people:
    - A. He first disputed with GOD'S PEOPLE, the Jews in the synagogue (v. 17).
      - i. This shows that God's people in the synagogue were given to idolatry right along with the heathen.
      - ii. Paul didn't first go into the bars and brothels; he went to the house of God.
      - iii. Judgment must begin at the house of God (1Pe 4:17).
      - iv. It is a shameful thing when God's people act as bad or worse than the heathen (2Ch 36:14; 2Ch 33:9; Eze 22:26; 1Co 3:1-3; 1Co 5:1-2).
      - v. God's call to His people was and still is "come out from among them" (2Co 6:17; Rev 18:4).
    - B. The second group he disputed with was the *devout* persons (v. 17).
      - i. Devout - 1. Devoted to divine worship or service; solemn and reverential in religious exercises; pious, religious.
      - ii. These were religious folks, but not of God's religion.
      - iii. Even in the OT, God sometimes called the heathen to repent (Jon 1:1-2).
    - C. The third group was folks in the market (v. 17).

- i. These were just your common everyday folks.
- ii. The time had come that God “commanded all men everywhere to repent” (**Act 17:30**).
- iii. Most times it is these types of folks that receive and obey the gospel (**Mar 12:37**) as opposed to the religious folks (**Luk 7:29-30; Mat 21:31-32**).

### III. Understanding and relating to the nature and thinking of unconverted men (**v. 18-21**).

1. After disputing with the Jews, pagans, and common folks, Paul has two groups of philosophers *encounter* him (**v. 18**).
2. Encounter - 1. To meet as an adversary; to confront in battle, assail.
  - A. The first group were the Epicureans.
    - i. Epicurean - 1. A disciple of Epicurus; one who holds views similar to his. 2. One who makes pleasure the chief object of his life.
    - ii. "For Epicurus, the purpose of philosophy was to attain the happy, tranquil life, characterized by ataraxia, peace and freedom from fear, and "aponia", the absence of pain, and by living a self-sufficient life surrounded by friends. He taught that pleasure and pain are the measures of what is good and bad, that death is the end of the body and the soul and should therefore not be feared, that the gods do not reward or punish humans, that the universe is infinite and eternal, and that events in the world are ultimately based on the motions and interactions of atoms moving in empty space." (Wikipedia)
    - iii. Most Americans are Epicureans with an “eat, drink, and be merry” philosophy (**Luk 12:19; 1Co 15:32**).
    - iv. Epicureanism is a fruit of the perilous times of the last days (**2Ti 3:1-4; Jud 1:17-19**).
    - v. Sensual - 1. a. Of or pertaining to the senses or physical sensation; sensory.
  - B. The second group were the Stoicks.
    - i. Stoic - 1. (With capital initial.) One of a school of Greek philosophers (founded by Zeno, fl. c 300 b.c.), characterized by the austerity of its ethical doctrines for some of which the name has become proverbial (see 2). 2. One who practises repression of emotion, indifference to pleasure or pain, and patient endurance.
    - ii. Austerity - 1. Harshness to the taste, astringent sourness. 2. a. Harshness to the feelings; stern, rigorous, or severe treatment or demeanour; judicial severity. 3. a. Severe self-discipline or self-restraint; moral strictness, rigorous abstinence, **asceticism**.
    - iii. Asceticism - 1. The principles or practice of the Ascetics; rigorous self-discipline, severe abstinence, **austerity**.
    - iv. Stoicks and Epicureans basically hold to philosophies that are polar opposites.
    - v. Stoicks are what the Bible refers to as will-worshipers (**Col 2:20-23**) and Pharisees, who “bind heavy burdens” on men (**Mat 23:4**).
    - vi. Like Epicureanism, Stoicism is likewise a fruit of the devil-led latter times (**1Ti 4:1-3**).
3. Notice how the Epicureans and Stoicks who held to mutually exclusive philosophies, put their differences aside and banded together to confront Paul in spiritual battle (**v. 18**).

- A. Jesus Christ sometimes becomes the tie that binds their hearts in heathen hatred (**Luk 23:12**).
  - B. Some simply resorted to character assassination, calling Paul a “babblers” (**v. 18**).
    - i. Babbler - 1. A foolish or idle talker, chatterer, prater.
    - ii. Chatterer - 1. One who chatters; an idle and petty talker, prater, babblers, tattler, prattler.
    - iii. Prater - One who prates; an obnoxious or idle talker, one who speaks much to little purpose, a mere talker, a chatterer.
    - iv. They were in essence accusing Paul of being a fool (**Pro 10:8; Ecc 10:11-14**).
    - v. The gospel is foolishness to worldly wise men (**1Co 1:18-23**).
    - vi. The irony is that they themselves were the babblers who “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (**Act 17:21**), and therefore were guilty of the very thing they accused Paul of.
    - vii. These philosophers were under the judgment of God for the same thing that they accused Paul of (**Mat 12:36**).
    - viii. This would have been an appropriate time for Paul to share with them the exhortation that he gave to the Romans (**Rom 2:1**).
  - C. Others at least charged Paul with something of substance, saying he was a setter forth of strange gods (**v. 18**).
    - i. Strange - 1. a. Of persons, language, customs, etc.: Of or belonging to another country; foreign, alien.
    - ii. This charge was a bit “strange” in that they themselves had made an alter “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”, which of course would be a foreign god (**Act 17:23**).
    - iii. These were obviously not the most logical thinkers! (**Jam 1:8**)
4. Although, seeming to be opposed to him, they brought him to Areopagus to find out what this new doctrine was (**v. 19-20**).
- A. Areopagus - 1. A hill at Athens where the highest judicial court of the city held its sittings; hence used for the court itself, and transf. of any important tribunal.
  - B. These men were apparently very serious about finding out what this new doctrine was that Paul taught since they took him to the highest court in Athens, which was the capital city of Greece!
  - C. They were curious, but not all of them for noble reasons (**Act 17:21 c/w Act 28:22**).
  - D. The message that Paul had shared with them up to this point had likely pricked those of them in the heart who were regenerate, which became apparent later in the chapter by their belief of the gospel.
  - E. Just because someone seems interested doesn’t necessarily mean they are regenerate or that they are sincere (**Act 8:9-13, 18-24; Act 24:24-26; Act 20:29-31; Jud 1:4**).
5. Thinking back to our own conversions...
- A. How many of us were Epicureans or Stoicks, so to speak, before we heard and believed the truth?
    - i. How many of us were making pleasure the chief object of our lives until a “Paul” came around?

- ii. How many of us were in some false Pharisaical system that made us deny liberties we had in Christ and hold to extra-Biblical standards of food, drink, clothing, language, and enjoyment?
- B. How many of us thought that the "Paul" that we met was a setter forth of a strange God when he preached the God and the Jesus of the Bible to us?
- C. How many of us argued against the doctrine and even spoke evil of the person that shared it with us?
- D. But then how many of us eventually said "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?"

#### IV. Successfully presenting the gospel to the unchurched heathen (v. 22-31).

##### 1. Paul's manner.

- A. Paul was not afraid of, nor did he shy away from, rebuking these philosophers (v. 22-23).
- B. Rebuking and reproof are an integral part of the ministry (2Ti 4:2).
- C. He spoke boldly as one that had authority which is what a pastor ought to do (Eph 6:20).
  - i. This is how Jesus taught (Mat 7:28-29).
  - ii. Being with Jesus should rub off on us (Act 4:13).
  - iii. We ought to pray for boldness to declare the word (Act 4:29-31).

##### 2. Paul's method.

- A. Paul first points out their error (v. 22).
  - i. They are too superstitious.
    - a. Superstitious - 1. Of the nature of, involving, or characterized by superstition.
    - b. Superstition - 1. Unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious, or imaginary, esp. in connexion with religion; religious belief or practice founded upon fear or ignorance.
  - ii. Casting down imaginations is a main purpose of the gospel (2Co 10:3-5).
  - iii. It was for this cause that God made Paul a minister (Act 26:16-18).
- B. Notice though how Paul took the time to observe their ways and beliefs BEFORE he corrected them (v.23 c/w Pro 18:13; Pro 19:2; Pro 25:8).
- C. Devotion - 1. The fact or quality of being devoted to religious observances and duties; religious devotedness or earnestness; reverence, devoutness. 2. Religious worship or observance; prayer and praise; divine worship. b. spec. (R.C. Ch.) Worship directed to a special object, e.g. the Sacred Heart, Precious Blood, etc. e. An object of religious worship. 1611 Bible Acts xvii. 21 As I passed by and beheld your deuotions
- D. Paul not only pointed out their error, but also acknowledged that they were sort of on the right track as they were ignorantly worshiping the true God (v.23).
  - i. We need to remember to not only condemn the bad, but to also commend the good.
  - ii. They had made an altar "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD."
  - iii. These philosophers were agnostics when it can to the identity of the true God.
  - iv. Agnostic - A. n. One who holds that the existence of anything beyond and behind material phenomena is unknown and (so far as can be judged)

- unknowable, and especially that a First Cause and an unseen world are subjects of which we know nothing.
- E. Notice that these men were actually worshipping the true God, but ignorantly.
    - i. Ignorantly - 1. In an ignorant manner; without knowledge.
    - ii. Ignorant - 1. a. Destitute of knowledge, either in general or with respect to a particular fact or subject; unknowing, uninformed, unlearned.
  - F. Ignorance is dangerous (**Hos 4:6; Isa 5:13**), but knowledge will save you (**Pro 11:9**).
  - G. Turning men from their ignorance is another main purpose of the gospel (**Eph 4:17-24**).
  - H. God doesn't want us to be ignorant! (**Rom 11:25; 1Co 10:1; 1Co 12:1; 2Co 1:8; 1Th 4:13; 2Pe 3:8**).
3. Paul then reasons with them from the creation, not the scriptures, since they didn't know the scriptures (**v.24**).
    - A. He was being "without law" to them that were without law (**1Co 9:20-23**).
    - B. Paul declares that God made the world and says that we can all SEE that He is therefore God (**Rom 1:20**).
    - C. Seeing *vbl. n.* - 1. a. The action (rarely an act) of the vb. see.
    - D. See *v.* - 1. a. *trans.* To perceive (light, colour, external objects and their movements) with the eyes, or by the sense of which the eye is the specific organ.
  4. Having proved that God made the universe, next Paul reasons that:
    - A. God doesn't dwell in temples made by men (**v.24 c/w 1Ki 8:27 c/w Jer 23:24**).
    - B. God is not worshiped with things made by men (**v.25**).
      - i. God doesn't need anything that men can dream up to worship Him with since He by Himself giveth to all life and breath and all things.
      - ii. God is indeed the provider of all things (**Mat 6:25-33; Psa 104:10-28**).
  5. Having proved that God created life and all things, he then reasons that God wants to be worshiped by His creation (**v.26-27**) and has facilitated that by:
    - A. Making out of one blood all nations of men (**v. 26**).
      - i. This refutes the idea of racial superiority.
      - ii. God doesn't take kindly to racists (**Num 12:1-10 c/w Jer 13:23**).
      - iii. This also refutes two-seedism.
      - iv. The N.T. knows nothing of racialism (**Col 3:11**).
    - B. Determining the times and bounds of their habitation (**v.26**).
      - i. Determine *v.* - I. To put an end or limit to; to come to an end. 1. *trans.* To put an end to (in time); to bring to an end; to end, conclude, terminate. 3. *trans.* To set bounds to; to bound, limit.
      - ii. Limit *n.* - 1. a. A boundary, frontier; an object serving to define a boundary, a landmark. Now only in narrower sense: A boundary or terminal point considered as confining or restricting; chiefly pl. bounds.
      - iii. Bound - 1. A landmark indicating the limit of an estate or territory.
      - iv. God did this so that men can seek Him (**v.27**).
        - a. That - 3. a. Introducing a clause expressing purpose, end, aim, or desire: with simple subjunctive (arch.), or with may (pa. tense might), should, rarely shall.
        - b. God wants the nations divided (**Gen 11:1-9**).

- c. United nations are formed with the intent to fight against God's people, not to promote peace (**Psa 83:1-8; Jos 9:1-2; Neh 4:7-9**).
  - d. 250 major wars have been fought killing 23 million people since 1945 when the UN was formed...so much for beating our swords into plowshares.
- 6. Having proved that God wants to be worshiped by His creation, Paul then describes the nature of God in how he relates to man (**v.27**) by showing that:
  - A. Men can seek God and find him (**Isa 55:6; Luk 11:9-13; Pro 2:1-6; Luk 18:28-30**).
  - B. God is not far from us.
  - C. This can be determined through observation and reason as well as from scripture.
  - D. If God created the universe (and He did) and man is the most complex and highest being in the natural creation, then God must be interested most in man if He is interested in anything that He created.
- 7. Paul then once again tells them that God is the creator and giver of life (**v.28**).
  - A. There is nothing wrong with reiterating and repeating what you are teaching someone (**Jud 5; 2Pe 1:12-13; 2Pe 3:1-2**).
  - B. To back up this fact, Paul quotes one of their own poets who said "For we are also his offspring."
    - i. Paul was being "all things to all men" (**1Co 9:21-22**).
    - ii. Notice that Paul was familiar with their own culture and beliefs.
    - iii. Truth can be found in strange places.
    - iv. We should acknowledge truth wherever it is spoken and use it.
  - C. Paul then uses the truth spoken by one of their own to point out a contradiction in their thinking (**v.29**).
    - i. If we are God's offspring then God cannot be, or even be like, gold, silver, or stone idols that man creates.
    - ii. Idols are powerless and stupid (**Psa 115:4-7**).
    - iii. So are people that make them and trust in them (**Psa 115:8**).
    - iv. How could God make man if man made God??
- 8. Up until this time, Paul was reasoning with them from creation, observation, and pieces of knowledge they already had, but then he starts preaching.
  - A. He tells them that up until that point, God had closed His eyes to the ignorance and idolatry of the heathen, but now He commands them to repent (**v.30**).
    - i. Wink - 1. a. *intr.* To close one's eyes.
    - ii. Telling men to repent is another main purpose of the gospel (**Mar 1:14-15; Luk 13:1-9**).
    - iii. The door of faith had already been opened to the Gentiles at that point (**Act 11:17-18; Act 14:27**).
  - B. He finishes by warning them that Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, will judge the world on the appointed day of judgment (**v.31 c/w Joh 5:22; Rom 14:10**).
    - i. Appoint v. - II. To determine authoritatively, prescribe, decree, ordain. 7. *trans.* To determine authoritatively, prescribe, fix (a time, later a place) for any act.
    - ii. Telling of the judgment to come is another main purpose of the gospel (**2Co 5:10-11; Act 24:24-25**).

iii. Telling men that Jesus was raised from the dead is another main purpose of the gospel (**1Co 15:4-8, 12-19**).

V. The revealing effect the gospel has upon the hearts of men (**v. 32-34**).

1. Upon hearing of the resurrection, the hearts of the people were made manifest (**v.32-34**).

A. Some mocked (**v. 32**).

i. The gospel is foolishness to the unsaved unregenerate natural man (**1Co 1:18-23; 1Co 2:14**).

ii. This is the most common response to the gospel.

B. Others wanted to hear more (**v. 32**).

i. They that are of God hear God's words (**Joh 8:47**).

ii. To those who are saved, the gospel is the power of God (**1Co 1:18; 1Co 2:12; 1Co 1:24**).

iii. A few have this response to the gospel.

C. But certain men *clave* unto Paul and believed (**v.34**).

i. These men were like the Thessalonians to whom the gospel came with *power* and in *much assurance*, and who *became followers* of Paul and of the Lord (**1Th 1:4-6**).

ii. Very few have this response to the gospel.

D. Some mocked, some were interested enough to want to hear more, but some were convicted in their hearts and *clave* unto Paul, which is what true believers ought to do to Paul (**1Co 11:1**) and of their own pastor (**1Th 5:12-13**).

i. These are the kind of believers who bring forth much fruit (**Mat 13:23**).

ii. These are the kind of believers we should all strive to be like.

2. The preaching of the gospel sorts men out.

A. Paul didn't need to figure out who were and were not elect among them.

B. Paul didn't need to try to exclude those whom he may have thought were not God's children; the gospel did that for him.

3. No matter the outcome, the preaching of the gospel is a sweet savor to God either way (**2Co 2:14-16**).