

ACTS 17:19-26 **Paul on Mars Hill**

A. Acts 17:19-20 - And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, *is*? Acts 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

*Paul has created a stir with his "gospel of grace" (D.B.R.), so these philosophers took Paul up to Mars Hill (Areopagus). It was the hill on which the highest court of ancient Athens held its sessions.

B. Acts 17:21 - (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

1. Their philosophers wanted Paul to explain the meaning of his new teaching. It seems that most in Athens spent a lot of time in listening to, or talking about, novelties.
2. Athenian philosophers tried any doctrine (teaching) that seemed to gain pre-eminence. They based their evaluations of doctrinal theories upon human opinions and natural wisdom (theirs).

Question? How can you sit in judgment of spiritual matters with natural minds? It is impossible!

I Corinthians 2:14-15 - But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Cor. 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

I Corinthians 2:11-13 - For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 1Cor. 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Ephesians 4:18 - Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

3. Today, many churchgoers are like these philosophers, always looking for some new interpretation and never satisfied with Scriptures' own truth. Note Peter's wisdom in II Peter 1:12 - [Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know *them*, and be established in the present truth.]

*When the truth of God's Word is at variance with society's, the church's, and Christendom's view or traditional belief, God's Word is to be believed and followed.

4. Many today are not standing for truth, but looking for something new just like the Athenians. Today's media tells us the latest fashions and advice on what's best for us. Then churches carry this mindset over into the Church (they say it's relevant). So the Church constantly has new trends, which causes immaturity in scripture knowledge - that causes them to put off old proven truth in order to grab hold of something new!

C.

Acts 17:22 - Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, *Ye* men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

1. When Paul is allowed to speak, he doesn't right off the bat lambast them or accuse them of being stupid philosophers. Paul somewhat commends them for being more religious and more **respectful** of the divine than most. He uses **tactfulness** in order to **receive** a hearing.
2. Paul, having presence of mind, acknowledges the Athenians' zeal they gave to religion. It is difficult to be rude and not listen to one who is kind and **bragging** a little on you!

* Remember, these men could have **forbidden** Paul's preaching in the city. But Paul had observed that the people were **proud of their religion**, which they practiced on every occasion. Paul's opening statement didn't antagonize them, but encouraged their approval so he could **continue** to speak.

D.

Acts 17:23 - For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

1. Paul tells them that their reverence for higher powers was a good thing, **but** it was **mis**directed. Paul tells them that he had observed their devotion to images. Paul says he even saw one altar "To The Unknown God".

*Remember? It was the Athenians' hope that if they had **forgotten** a god, or even **offended** a deity, that deity would accept their expression of faith to them (gods). Doing that might prevent any god that they did not know from **punishing** them.

2. Paul tells them, the One whom you worship as **unknown**, I declare Him. **Or**, I will tell you of the **true** God whom you worship as **unknown**.

*In making this statement, Paul answers their charge of introducing strange deities (vs. 18). Paul here pleads not guilty! God was **no** stranger to Paul.

E.

Acts 17:24 - God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

1. Here Paul answers the **Stoics**, who claimed the universe was God, and the **Epicureans**, who claimed that any god who existed was too far off to concern themselves with this planet. **Both untrue!**

*Paul tactfully rebukes the idolatry which **both** engaged in [God...dwelleth not in temples made with hands].

2. Paul tells them his God created everything, **sustains** it all and is **real**, **alive**, **personal**, and Lord over all!

Hebrews 1:10 - And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:

Colossians 1:16-17 - For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: Col. 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

3. Today, man attacks God and His creation in order to not be **re**sponsible to Him. So they have tried to **ex**clude Him.

Romans 1:22, 28 - Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, Rom. 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

4. Also remember that creation reveals man's false theories:
 - a. Atheism is refuted - says there is **no** God. But creation (Gen. 1:1) shows a **per**sonal God, Who created the universe.
 - b. Pantheism is refuted - says **all** is god. Genesis 1:1 shows God involved in His creation, but **sep**arate from it. He is not a tree, cow, etc.
 - c. Polytheism is refuted - says **many** gods. Genesis 1:1 shows there is only one true God, no other God, and He caused - started - created it all.
 - d. Fatalism is refuted - says what will be will be. Life had little meaning. Genesis 1:1 shows God has a plan and purpose, giving **mean**ing to creation and life.
 - e. Dualism is refuted - says good and evil are **equal** (Satan-God!). Genesis 1:1 shows that it was God alone Who is **good** when He created (Gen. 1:31).
 - f. Humanism is defeated - says man **himself** is the center of the universe. Genesis 1:1 shows it is **God**, not man, Who is the ultimate center of the universe and reality.
 - g. Evolution is defeated - says man has evolved over millions of years. Genesis 1:1 shows God created all things and He did this in **six** literal days (Gen. 1:31, Exo. 20:11).
5. Genesis 1:1 says creation is the work of God in bringing **all things** into **ex**istence. Since everything in the universe had its beginning with God, that makes God the One and only true **et**ernal God.

I Timothy 1:17 - Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

- a. The Jewish people (synagogue) had the knowledge of God's creating work (**O.T.**). So when Paul preached to them, he usually could just go to the heart of the gospel. But with the Gentiles (idolatry), they usually did not have the foundation of creation knowledge. So Paul had to lay this foundational truth of God's creation, then he could **pro**ceed with the gospel.
 - b. Do you recall that Paul (Saul of Tarsus) was at Stephen's message and his stoning? Stephen had said: Acts 7:48-50 - [Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Acts 7:49 Heaven *is* my throne, and earth *is* my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what *is* the place of my rest? Acts 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things?]
- *Sound familiar?
- c. Psalm 24:1 - The earth *is* the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

*Paul is teaching that God doesn't live in man-made structures like temples or idols, as these Athenians assumed. Almighty God (Paul's) cannot be **re**stricted to a handmade shrine.

Solomon says in I Kings 8:27 - [But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?

F.

Acts 17:25 - Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

1. God isn't made by man's hands, or sustained by man trying to materially (altars-idols) humanize Him. God doesn't need help from man to make Him **app**ear before man (II Cor. 5:7).

Paul is saying quite the contrary. God is self-sufficient in and of Himself. God needs no assistance in being God. It is man who needs God, since it is God Who provides everything necessary for man's life - including his **next breath!

Isaiah 42:5 - Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

2. In our context, remember these idol worshippers' rituals. They actually would build/make their idol/god, then build an altar for their idol/god. They would then bring offerings to **feed** their god, wanting their god to know they were thinking of them/him.

G.

Acts 17:26 - And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

1. Paul shows here why the Epicurean "god is not involved" theory and the Stoic "god of fatalism" theory were both **wrong**!

God is intimately involved and in control of everything because He does have a **plan for man.

2. By saying this, Paul is informing these Athenians that they were not any better than any other people, and their country, Greece, was not better than any other nation.

*This must have **hit** their pride, for they did hold that they were better than others (Prov. 13:10).

3. Paul lets them know they were just like anyone else, because all originated from "one blood" - **Adam**!

*Also, God's purpose and plan always trumps man's. We see this in that God determines nations, their **times**, and **boundaries** as it pleases Him.

Daniel 2:20-21 - Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: Dan. 2:21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

Psalms 74:17 - Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.

*Isn't it interesting that the thing that has produced wars was that nations do not want to stay where they belong? They always want someone else's land (Germany, Russia, China, N. Korea, Europe, Islam, etc.).

4. Dispensationally, this "one blood" is interesting in Verse 26. When Israel's Kingdom message was being preached, the Lord and the 12 almost never went farther back in human history than to David and Abraham.

*This was because of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the Gentiles had been cast away. The establishment of the Messianic Kingdom was based upon the promises made to two patriarchs.

Matthew 1:1 - The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

5. It is Paul who consistently goes back to Adam ("one blood"), the first man, and points from Adam to Christ - the second man.

I Corinthians 15:45-57 - And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit. 1Cor. 15:46 Howbeit that *was* not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 1Cor. 15:47 The first man *is* of the earth, earthy; the second man *is* the Lord from heaven.

**Paul also is the one who gives understanding to the sin problem, how it originated and sin's only solution.

Romans 5:12 - Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Romans 5:19 - For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.