

**ye ignorantly
worship
him declare
I unto you**

Acts 17:22 – 18:8

~ **Our Spiritual Safari** is with Paul the apostle on Mars Hill in this section of Scripture as he preaches a deeply profound message to the citizens of Athens, Greece. In my estimation, this is the single most remarkable sermon Paul gave in his ministry. It is a formal message addressing “... ye men of Athens.” When Paul tells them they are “... too superstitious” – that is an understatement. What these people were was too RELIGIOUS! Athens was steeped in idolatry. The pantheon of grotesque gods had no end! They had small and great, few and many gods; they had a different god for just about every occasion and aspect of their lives.

Sometimes, we hear the questions asked, “... why send missionaries to a certain place because they already have a religion?” When Paul went down into Athens, I’m sure someone asked him the same question. Of course, religion was the entire problem in Athens. If you turn to Christ in repentance, you’re going to have to lose your religion, friends. That’s the sad condition of MOST church members today – they need to lose their religion so they can finally find the Lord Jesus Christ; more specifically – so Christ will associate with them. The problem is never that a person is too bad to be saved; oh, no – the problem is that people are too GOOD to be saved! Most are too strong to be used by God. They think they are “anointed” and “highly favored” and “daughters of the King” and all that perfect nonsense. They have no idea God is only saving the soul who cries out to Him for mercy and deliverance. THIS is the reason Paul is in Athens at the time in which we are studying....

XVII

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 religious.

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.

~ This is the one-time Paul doesn't begin in a Jewish synagogue, you may note. There are two ways this "UNKNOWN GOD" can be understood. Some people take it to mean the Athenians were broad-minded and did this so no one would be left out. Anyone who visited Athens could never say there was no altar to their particular god! They would just point to the unknown god's altar, and they would appear very intellectual and open-minded. Thus, anyone could worship at the altar of the unknown god.

More reasonably, the altar to the "UNKNOWN GOD" was an altar to a God they simply did not know – but they sensed the existence of. It is only sensible to conclude many pagan people recognized their idols were absurd and empty and behind their worship was meaninglessness. Many modern self-proclaimed atheists just aren't honest with themselves. They feel in their hearts there is a True and Living God. The reason they continue to deny Him is usually because they have no idea how to make contact with Him!

The "devotions" in verse twenty-three were the objects of their worship. The altar at the Parthenon was the altar built to Athena, a loosely termed virgin goddess of the Athenians. Her image was surrounded by all manner of idolatry. Paul saw this and in the midst of it was an altar to a God – or god – they didn't even know. Today, rank atheism is the worst religion. They worship themselves. Philosophy was either wrong then or wrong now; can't be both. The problem the atheist has today is that they have lived in sin for so long and have rejected Him so many times that He has become inaccessible – which is the course America is on tonight collectively as a nation. When this happens, people will turn to any and all sorts of idols.

So, Paul wants to talk to them about the "UNKNOWN GOD." Paul did not use a very diplomatic approach, to be sure. See, the Athenians thought they knew everything, and they fancied themselves the world's great philosophers and thinkers; but, at the same time, they had this "unknown" – and exposing that contradiction to a realization in their minds was a nasty

little wake up call. The Athenians talked back and forth – but not TO each other – only AT each other; much like any modern-day college campus debate. Neither side listens to the other because they are too busy thinking about what they want to say next. Neither side is really convinced they are right – but they are convinced the other side is WRONG. Well, the first thing Paul tells them about their “UNKNOWN GOD” is that He is their Creator....

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;

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;

~ Remember, even in the Old Testament, when God gave Moses the tabernacle, God made it clear that He didn't dwell there. When Solomon dedicated the temple he said, “... the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Thee!” No building made by man here on earth is inhabited by God. The Old Testament saints recognized this as a fact. Further, they understood that man lives in a universe God made. Well, the Athenians thought they could build a temple for their gods to move into. Pausanius and Philostratus established that fact.

Verse twenty-five is a master stroke as Paul makes it clear God doesn't need anything from you. The Athenians didn't bring an offering to appease their gods; they just wanted to remind their idols that they were thinking about them. It really made no sense at all. See, God is on the giving end of things, and WE are on the receiving end. God gave us life, breath, the sun, the moon - the stars; but the Athenians worshipped all things that had been given to them. Apollo would come across the sky dragging some ridiculous chariot and they wanted to hop on board. They were just absolutely ignorant that the sky was another of God's creation and gifts to them and for them. They could never get to the place where they realized the True and Living God Who gave all these things to them was also the only One Who could give them salvation....

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;

~ There is no end to debate about the term "one blood." This simply means God has made us one human family. God made of one all nations of men on the face of the earth. God created the universe and He created humanity as we know it. This is NOT talking about "brotherhood." The ONLY "brotherhood" Scripture teaches is the brotherhood of those who are in Christ. Now, to be sure, there IS a brotherhood of sin because we are ALL sinners, and we all stand on the same plane. The Lord Jesus Christ is the True God Who created all things, all men; and He placed us each in certain geographical locations. Well, somehow Paul understood the medical standpoint of how certain complexions were made for specific earthly regions. Perhaps many of our ancestors should have stayed where they belong instead of sailing away to foreign lands. Let's move on....

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his creation.

~ The idea of "feeling after him" means groping at God; but man is not searching for the Living and True God, friends. No, this means that man is searching for "a" god. Man is more than willing to stop at any time and set up his own idols so he can worship something. No man seeketh after the True and Living God, according to Scriptures; but man IS on a search. Paul is NOT teaching pantheism, meaning everything is God, either; Paul is saying that God is BEYOND this created universe.

Aratus was one of the poets mentioned in verse twenty-eight. In 276 B.C., his major work was a hexameter poem. Aratus was a Greek didactic poet. There was also Cleanthes around 300. B.C. who was famous for his hymn to Zeus. They both, more or less, conclude that we are the creatures of a god, although they do not mean the True and Living God by any stretch of an

imagination. Well, Paul says we are the creation of the True and Living God – the “UNKNOWN GOD” to them; and Paul defines God....

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

~ Paul says bluntly they ought not be such rank idolaters. It's insulting and combative. As we read on, Paul tells them the True and Living God is a Redeemer from sins. At the time in which we are studying, God had shut His eyes to their ignorance in paganism; but now, light has come into the world – that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. God is now telling man to turn to that light for salvation. Paul presents the True and Living God as the judge of our future because light creates responsibility. So, God is not only the Creator, but He is our Judge; and when God judges us it will be righteousness – even for those sent to hell....

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

33 So Paul departed from among them.

~ Paul presents the same topic he always presented; and that is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The One, Who is the judge, has nail-pierced hands because He is now come back from the dead. Well, some mocked Paul because Platonism denies wholeheartedly the physical resurrection of the dead. Platonism does teach a spiritual resurrection; but that's not what we're talking about here, by any means. Some ridiculed Paul, but some believed. That's how it is today, too. Some will believe – some won't. So, Paul departed - but that doesn't mean he failed there....

34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

XVIII

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

~ Alright, as we begin a new chapter in Paul's life, he is still alone on his second missionary journey. Remember, Silas and Timothy had stayed behind in Thessalonica in our last report. Paul is waiting for them to rejoin him and bring a report from the churches there and in Berea. Paul has done his work in Athens, so he heads for Corinth; and that's a long walk, friends. It's a beautiful country, and Paul would have gone past where the battle of Salamis was fought at sea, but it would be a difficult walk - even for those who are in the best of health. That's where the Persian fleet was destroyed. There are also many other historical places along that route between Athens and Corinth.

Corinth was the center of Paul's second and third missionary journeys. It seems Paul's most effective ministry was in Corinth and Ephesus; Ephesus being another religious center, and Corinth being a sin center. Both cities were great commercial centers, too. Corinth was THE most wicked city on Paul's journey yet. When we take up the epistles in our Spiritual Safari, we will carefully examine the background for each city and the reason Paul wrote as he did.

Corinth was the Sodom or Gomorrah of Paul's day. We might call it the Las Vegas of OUR day. Corinth was the place where you could live it up and be entertained in every debauched way known to man. There were two tremendous theaters there. People came from all over the Roman Empire to vacation in Corinth. Sex, drink and any sensual pleasure you could dream up was perfected there. The remains of an enormous Roman bath are still in Corinth. It is an absolutely disgusting place; and the bath was where they went to sober up. The temple to Aphrodite and Venus is where the thousand so-called vestal virgins resided. Of course, these were anything

but virgins – they were prostitutes. Sex was the religion in this city. This is nothing new today; they perfected perverted sex and labeled it religion a LONG time ago....

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

~ Anti-Semitism rolls like a tsunami in Rome. This couple, Priscilla and Aquila were lucky to escape Claudius. They are brought together by the Holy Spirit, and this is where we see Paul back in the synagogue speaking about Jesus as the Messiah. Of course, the Jews don't care for that, so they oppose him. This is the point where Paul makes the break, and we will only see him in a ministry to the Gentile world after this. Even so, Paul had many converts amongst the Jews in Corinth. As our safari travels on, we're going to spend about a year and a half with Paul in this city....

6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

~ Have you considered that one generation of believers does not mean the next generation will be believers? In just about every religion, those born into it remain life-long members – but it is not so with the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each individual must choose Christ for himself or herself. So, the work of evangelism continues from generation to generation. That's the focus of the Spiritual Safari as I work to fulfill my God-appointed mission of taking the entire Word of God to the entire world in the sound doctrine of the apostles. As this safari reaches into every county and country of the world with a systematic teaching of the Scriptures, I am faced with the depravity of their souls. I also see the holiness of God and the grace of God in His salvation – and it is His alone. It's not easy, friends. I hope you will remember to pray for me ~
