

Acts Chapter 18

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[0 : 00] Welcome to the first day of spring. Thought I'd never get here, but it's going to come riding in around noon today, something like that. And we are looking, this has been a winter to remember, hasn't it?

It's also a winter to forget, for sure. Our minister's sermon one Sunday concerned the relationship between fact and faith.

He said that you are sitting before me in this church, he said, is a fact. That I am standing speaking to you from this pulpit is a fact, but it is only faith that makes me believe anyone is listening.

I know that feeling sometimes. But this is one that talks it. Reverend Dr. Roy C. Delamont, chaplain at Payne College in Augusta, Georgia, preached the shortest sermon in the college's 80-year history.

His topic was, What does Christ answer when we ask, Lord, what's in religion for me? The complete text of his remarks, nothing.

[1 : 17] He said later that his sermon was a corrective for people brought up on the gimme gimme gospel.

Asked how long it had taken to prepare his message, Dr. Delamont replied, 20 years. A lot of truth in that brevity, you know.

Remember famous words of JFK when he said, Ask not what your country can do for you, rather ask what you can do for your country. Same thing can apply to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This gospel is not provided and prepared for us in order that we may just get something from it, but that we may give something to it. And our giving to it is to be out of gratitude and appreciation for what has been done for us.

Well, we are in Acts chapter 18. I don't know if you all have scripture sheets. I gave out the last ones I had last week. But if you will turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 18, we are continuing to follow Paul's missionary journey, and he is about to wrap up his second journey.

[2 : 37] He will begin his third. We are in Acts, and we'll recap just a little bit. In verse 4, Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded...

I'm in verse 4 of Acts chapter 18. He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. This is the principle of argumentation, and it is a solid principle that every believer ought to be eager to adopt because it is the method whereby we present the gospel.

We are called to share the gospel, and we are called to argue for the gospel. I'm not talking about being argumentative. I'm not talking about looking for a fight.

But when we talk about arguing for the gospel, we simply mean that we ought to be able and prepared to give good, logical reasons for the position that we hold.

This is also referred to as apologetics. And the word apologetics, compound Greek word, it simply means from words. From words. That means we need to be able to articulate, explain, and defend the gospel with our words.

[4 : 03] And the watch word for that is 1 Peter 3, and I think it's verse 15. Paul said, But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer.

To give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is within you, with meekness and with fear. We ought to be able to do that. In other words, let me put it this way.

If somebody asks you, What's this Christianity stuff all about? Why are you a Christian? What would you tell them? Well, this is the way I was brought up?

That's not good enough. Or this is what my church teaches? That's not good enough. You need to be able to articulate confident, logical answers for your position.

And the Apostle Paul was able to do that. And, of course, he instructs us to do it too. And when you are given an opportunity to articulate the gospel, you ought to be able to tell people why you have become a Christian and what it means to you.

[5 : 06] So this is exactly what Paul's doing, but he's got a really tough audience. Because when you go up against an audience that requires not merely taking in what you have to give, but at the same time, they have to reject something that they have always believed and held up to that point of time.

You are asking a lot from your audience. You're asking your audience to reverse themselves on something. The word for that is repent. It means change your mind.

It is a very, very difficult thing for someone who has believed anything for a number of years to hear information that contradicts that and then be able to say, you know what?

I've been wrong. I've been wrong about what I believe regarding this all this time.

It does a job on the ego to be able to say what I have believed up to this time is wrong.

[6 : 25] I've got to change my mind. Nobody had to confront that more powerfully than Saul of Tarsus when he was on that Damascus road and saw this vision from Christ who said, Saul, Saul, why persecute us now me?

Well, that's exactly what he was doing and that he was persecuting believers who believed in Christ and he'd gone all the way out of the country, left Israel, went all the way to the land of Syria, Damascus, simply for the purpose of gathering up Christians who had fled from Jerusalem because of the persecution and they went clear out of the country to Damascus and he went up there to find them and bring them back in chains and you know the story of what happened on the road to Damascus.

So now, Paul has been confronted with this living Christ and it absolutely bowled him over. Couldn't get over it. They had to lead him into town by the hand and they went to the house of a man named Ananias, not confused with Ananias and Sapphira, different Ananias, and there, Saul of Tarsus was sitting in this man's house trying to figure out what in the world is going on.

How can this be? This one whom he was persecuting and persecuting his followers has appeared to him, identified himself as the Son of God, as the Messiah, and Paul, we are told, did not eat nor drink anything for three days.

It wasn't because he wasn't hungry. It wasn't because he wasn't thirsty. It was because he was traumatized. You've heard of PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, that so many of our guys have experienced from Iraq and Afghanistan, and a lot of them from World War II, only we didn't know what to call it.

[8 : 32] We call it shell shock. But these guys in combat have seen and heard such amazing things that have impacted them for the rest of their life.

Stuff that they can't get out of their mind, and it does a job on them with nightmares and all kinds of things. That's similar to what Saul of Tarsus was experiencing. It wasn't a combat thing, but it was a mental thing, an emotional thing, that was so much of an upheaval to him, it just psyched him out. And he is contemplating, now, what is he going to do with this? This information, can this be true? Was I dreaming? Was that real?

Did that really happen? And the people who were with him were dazzled by the light, blinded by the light. That was the Shekinah glory. And they heard a voice, but they couldn't detect what the voice was saying.

But Saul heard it because it was spoken to him and it was the risen Christ. And now this man is in shock. And finally, he comes to grips this thing is true.

[9 : 45] This same man who just a little bit before that was at the stoning of Stephen and held the coats of those who threw the stones.

And these were the leadership of Israel, the Sanhedrin, the council. They were the ones who physically stoned Stephen and Saul of Tarsus was right there saying, hit him again.

Give it to him. And he held her coats and Stephen died under a massive barrage of stones and boulders and everything else. And Saul of Tarsus witnessed that.

But before Stephen died, he gave that remarkable recount of the whole history of Israel. There in Acts chapter 7, recounted the whole thing. Saul took it all in.

He thought if ever there was anyone who deserved to die, it was this man who was trying to stamp out Judaism, who was corrupting Judaism with this teaching about Jesus of Nazareth.

[10 : 45] And he delighted in Stephen's stoning. And now, he's got to reverse himself. Now he's got to deal with this and say, I was blinded.

I was wrong. How could I have been so wrong? And not only that, but all of the intelligentsia of Israel, these 70 men who comprised the Sanhedrin, and I don't know how many were present at the stoning of Stephen, but there were a significant number of them there.

They were all wrong too, but how could they all be wrong? They're the experts. Well, fellas, experts can be wrong about a lot of things. How many times over the years have scientific experts had to reverse themselves?

Medical experts had to reverse themselves. Electronic experts had to reverse themselves. Because the introduction of new information proves to you that the position you held formerly is not tenable, and you have to reverse it and go with something else.

That's what happens when the gospel is preached. So Paul went into the synagogue, and we are told in Acts 9 when he's converted, after these three days, we're told that he took meat and was strengthened, and the Lord sent, got my names wrong, it was Ananias that the Lord sent to lay hands on Paul and he would receive his sight back again, and we're told then in Acts 9 that immediately, right after that, right after Paul had seen the vision, spent the three days without any food, had taken nourishment, Ananias came, laid hands on him, his vision is restored because the light had blinded him, and the first thing he does is he heads for the Jewish synagogue there in Damascus.

[12 : 32] And you know what he has to tell them? He has to tell them why he had come there. He has to tell them what happened on the road. He has to tell them that you know what?

Those I came here to persecute and to round up and take back to Jerusalem as prisoners, they are my brethren. They are my friends.

They are my allies. And these people are sitting there in this Damascus synagogue looking at each other and saying, is this guy for real? Is this the Saul of Tarsus that we know?

What's going on here anyway? And it was a similar story in every synagogue that he went in. And we are told here in Acts chapter 18 and verse 4 that he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

His argumentation is so powerful. And what he's doing, he doesn't have any New Testament. Remember, all he has is the Old Testament. But that's enough. Because Jesus Christ as the Messiah of God is found all throughout the Old Testament.

[13 : 40] And he is using those Old Testament scriptures and he's saying, Psalm 22, we've got a perfect description of a man dying from being crucified. Read it. It's in Psalm 22.

And it's a crucifixion account. But the Jews never crucified anybody. How do you explain this? Who is this man? It's Jesus of Nazareth. He's going to be crucified by the Romans.

And when David wrote that 22nd Psalm, it was a thousand years before Christ was even born.

What are you going to do with that? How can you deny that? Isaiah 53.

Isaiah wrote this content seven centuries before Christ was born in Bethlehem. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. Chastisement of our peace is upon him. Who is this speaking of? It's speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah who was to come. And lights were going on in the minds of these guys all over that synagogue.

[14 : 39] Some of them were saying, that's it. That's it. That fits. That fits. I never understood that passage before. I had no idea what that meant. It must refer to Jesus of Nazareth.

And many of them were coming to faith and there were others who were saying, this guy's nuts.

This is the craziest thing I ever heard. Get him out of here. Who put him on the speaking platform anyway? So there's a tremendous division and it all has to do with the person of Christ.

we read in verse 5 of chapter 18. When Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit. Look at the way these are translated.

These are other translations here that are given. He was constrained by the word, occupied with preaching, engrossed with the word, completely given up to the word, completely processed by the message.

In other words, Paul, in this particular instance as well as others, but here it emphasizes it, he really got into this message and the importance of delivering it.

[15 : 38] He was seized in his spirit. He was compelled in a way that he just, like Jeremiah, he was weary with forbearing and he could not hold it in.

What I have to share is so relevant, so important, so vital, I can't contain it. It doesn't make any difference what price might have to be paid for preaching it. You have to preach it. This truth is too vital to hold to yourself. So he just gave it out and the more he gave out, the more reception it got, both positive and negative. So he is pressed in the spirit and he testified to the Jews that, and this was the message, that Jesus was Christ.

He really was the real McCoy. Well, I don't think Paul called it that, but you know what I mean? Jesus Christ really was the Messiah.

[16:39] And you know what? We crucified him. We put him to death. What are you going to do about that? You can't, you can't change it.

You can't run the clock back and play it over again. There's no redos here. What are you going to do? You're going to do the toughest thing you will ever be called upon to do in your life. And that is, you're going to have to say, you know what? I was wrong. I'm so sorry and I was wrong. It takes a really, really big person to say I was wrong. because it makes us look bad. It makes us look ignorant. It makes us feel bad. It makes us feel like we don't know very much that we were wrong about such an important issue as that.

[17:41] It is a big, big person that has the gumption to say this is my bad. I had it all wrong here. I need to reverse myself.

There are people who would rather die and go to their grave than do that. That's called unbelief. It's also called being stiff-necked which means your head will not turn because your neck won't let it. You won't reverse yourself. You won't change your position. God constantly called his own people, the Jew, a stubborn and a stiff-necked people.

And what was their big problem? Unbelief. A refusal to believe what God said. Fellas, the woods are full of them today. Anyone who has not embraced Jesus Christ as their substitute, their Savior, is living in unbelief and it is the greatest faction of unbelief that exists.

So he testifies to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, he was the Messiah, and they crucified him. And when they opposed themselves, that means they began rejecting Paul's message that was for them and their rejection was against their own best interests.

[19:10] And, you know, we can do that a lot. I don't know how many times growing up I did stupid things that were not in my best interest.

They were actually against me. They weren't in favor of me. And who was doing them? I was doing them. And I suspect that we're all guilty of that one time or another. And the text here says they were opposing.

They opposed themselves. And they opposed themselves against Paul too. And they set their faces against him. However, when they turned against him and blasphemed, now what they are doing here is blasphemy.

I pointed out to you I think before. Blasphemy is a sin against deity. We do not blaspheme each other because we are equals.

A man may curse another man or curse at another man, but blasphemy is reserved for deity. And this is one of the evidences of course that Jesus Christ was and is deity because he is referred to as a recipient or a victim of blasphemy a number of times in the New Testament particularly.

[20:23] You can only blaspheme deity. And they were blaspheming and cursing Christ and saying all kinds of derogatory things about him just like some of the atheist writers are saying even today.

They blasphemed him. Some said they became abusive. They said evil words. They reviled him. And as a result, Paul shook his raiment which means nothing to us. But in this culture in the Middle East a couple of thousand years ago when you would take your raiment and by the way the raiment was a large outer robe that went down pretty much to the ankles and we would call it an oversized bathrobe perhaps.

But that was the outer garment and they had underwear that they wore under that. But the outer garment was gathered around the waist with a sash.

We would probably call it a belt but it was a sash that was probably about 12 or 14 feet long and about 3 to 6 inches wide and they would just wrap that around their waist several times and then they would tuck because this thing had no pockets in it they would tuck their coin purse or whatever valuable in that sash and hold that to their waist.

And if they were going to do something that was really rigorous they would start unwinding that sash so it would be very long maybe 10 12 feet long altogether and then they would put it under their thighs this way and put it under their thighs this way it's called girding up your loins when you're going to engage in some kind of physical activity where you don't want this thing being a hindrance all of this material.

[21 : 56] Whenever they went into battle they would gird up their loins because you don't want to be restricted with this long flowing thing being any kind of a hindrance to your physical activity.

And all of that is connected with this. So he's shaking his garment he loosed the garment and he's just shaking it like this just shaking this garment and that is a statement to the idea that I am through with you.

I am wiping my hands of this whole situation. I have delivered myself in giving you this message. Now your blood is on your own heads. as long as we haven't given the message we bear some responsibility.

But once we have given the message we transfer the responsibility for what is done with that message from ourselves to the one who received the message. Now it's up to you.

What are you going to do with it? You've been told. This is what Paul is saying. And he shook his garment and he is saying your blood be upon your own heads.

[23 : 12] If you perish and are separated from God forever you won't be able to blame me. You'll have to blame yourself for having rejected the message.

Your blood be upon your own heads. I am clean. From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. Well isn't that who he was supposed to be going to anyway? Because while the twelve apostles were called by Christ in Matthew 10 they were called to go strictly exclusively to the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

Don't go anywhere else. But Paul is different. He is the apostle to the Gentiles.

Gentiles never had an apostle. Israel had twelve. This man who is an apostle to the Gentiles is going with a message that up to this time had never been preached.

And the message was so different this is why the Jews rejected it. Because Paul is going to be saying things like listen you Jews think that you stand before God accepted and approved because you keep the law of Moses.

[24 : 33] God says the law of Moses was never given to impart life to anyone. By the law is the knowledge of sin.

The law was given by a perfect God to imperfect people to show you that you don't measure up. That's the purpose of the law.

It is to reveal the presence of sin. And then once you are aware of that then you go to the source for cleansing. The law doesn't cleanse. The law doesn't give life.

All the law can do is say guilty guilty guilty guilty. That was the Mosaic law. And Paul is going to explain this when he gets to Galatians later. But he is saying by the law sin is revealed but the law cannot cleanse you from your sin.

The law cannot forgive you. All the law can do is say guilty guilty guilty guilty. And I mentioned Galatians there's a passage in I think it's Galatians 3 where Paul says the law was our schoolmaster.

[25 : 40] The law was our teacher. The law was our coach. And the intent of the law was to point people to the one who could do something about the condemnation that the law imposed upon us.

and that's why Christ came. That's who he was. To deliver from the demands of the law. The wages of sin is death. Spiritual death.

That's what the law demands. And when Christ came and paid that price Paul then is going to write to the Romans there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

Wow. He is giving them the consequences of the law being met in the person of Christ and while God demands perfection and no one can provide that Jesus did and he who knew no sin was made to be sin for us.

So the perfection that God demands is perfection you cannot provide. Face it. Deal with it. You can't be that good.

[27 : 02] And you know you aren't anyway. So you come to Christ and Christ gives you as a free gift.

He gives you his righteousness. He replaces your righteousness filthy rags with a robe of righteousness and he makes you accepted in the beloved. That is incredible. Fellas, that's the gospel. See why this is called good news? And this is what Paul is preaching. But this is so foreign to these people because they were all brought up on a misunderstanding of the law.

And the misunderstanding still exists today. People think, how do you go to heaven? Well, you be good. You keep the law. Well, do you keep the law?

Well, I try. Have you done enough? Well, I hope so. There's no assurance. There's no confidence there. It's just a big question mark. But when Jesus Christ comes in and regenerates you on the inside where only God can reach, that places you in union with Jesus Christ.

[28 : 21] So, his righteousness becomes yours. His death becomes yours. His resurrection becomes yours. That's what it means to be in Christ. And Paul is preaching this and it is so foreign to these Jews.

I can understand them rejecting it. Someone has said that hardly anyone ever believes on Christ the first time they hear the gospel.

hardly everyone. Anyone. Because it's so foreign to our thing. We're all committed to operating on the merit system. You have to be good enough.

You have to deserve it. You have to work hard. You have to pray. You have to go to church. You have to do this and do that. All the rest of it. That's what we're used to. Because fellas, that's the way life works in every other facet.

If you be good, good results. If you're bad, bad results. Want to go to heaven? Be good. And God will reward you for being good with heaven.

[29 : 21] That's the standard thinking. That's conventional wisdom today. That's what probably 8 out of 10 people believe. If you were to take a poll, they think good people go to heaven. Bad people, well, God's got someplace else for them.

But good people go. No, no, no, no. It isn't good people that go to heaven. It's forgiven people that go to heaven. Forgiven people. Dave, if people are believing, I mean, some people believe that if I'm good, I'll go to heaven.

Where are they getting that? They're getting that from their parents or from what's being preached to them in the church. Yeah, that's true. And they're also getting it from their own personal logical reasoning.

Because that's the way life works. Be good, do good, good things happen. Be bad, do bad, bad things happen. And they transfer that to salvation and the eternal state.

And I pointed out to you before that man reasons with a warped intellect. Our thinking processes and abilities are skewed.

[30 : 31] And the reason they are, guys, is because that's part of the fall. Our intellect has fallen too. Not only that, but we've got an adversary that is working against us, and that is Satan himself.

And that verse that I've quoted for you a number of times from 2 Corinthians 4, Paul said, if our gospel, if our good news be hid, hidden so that people don't get it, don't see it.

If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. Now listen, listen, whose minds, whose minds, thinking capacity, thinking ability, whose minds have been blinded by the God of this age.

The God of this age is Satan. He is the prince of the power of the air. He is in charge of this fallen world.

You don't think God is responsible for all the stuff you see going on, do you? You see, God took his hands off back in Genesis 3, and when man chose to rebel against God and go his own way, God as much as said to Adam, you have just created for yourself a different world from the one I created, and I don't think you're going to like it.

[32 : 10] That's the world we're living with today, and it is a world filled with death and disease and conflict and everything that goes with fallenness.

This present world is the world that man remade from the world that God made that he was able to pronounce. It's very good.

Very good. Until man says, I want to make some improvements, and we've got what we've got.

Don't? When Paul gives up on the Jews, he says he's going to the Gentiles.

Now he uses the Old Testament with the Jews. What does he use to the Gentiles? He would not be able to use the Old Testament. Well, I'm sure that he did use the Old Testament, but you're right in

one respect in that the Gentiles had no reference box for the Old Testament.

The Jews were thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament, and that's why he could point out Christ everywhere. And we saw in Acts 17 when he went to the philosophers on Mars Hill, he didn't use the Old Testament for that very reason because they didn't have a background or connection with it, and they couldn't relate.

[33 : 21] So he told them that, well, I won't go back to Acts 17, but it's just back in the creepy, well, maybe I will for just a moment. Okay. The text is shot anyway.

I'm not going to get where I plan to go. But in Acts 17, he is talking to these people on Mars Hill, and be reminded, guys, these philosophers on Mars Hill are the intelligentsia of the day.

This is the brain trust of Athens, Greece, and these people are descendants of Socrates, and Plato, and Aristotle.

I mean, these guys are heavy thinkers, really. And these philosophers are gathered there on Mars Hill, the Areopaga, and he is preaching to them, but his conclusion is in verse 30, that therefore, chapter 17, having overlooked the times of ignorance, and I think that the times of ignorance here refers to the times of mankind prior to the coming and death of Christ.

He goes on and says, the times of ignorance, God is now, now, as of the time he was speaking, he's saying, Paul is saying, it is different now, than it was then.

[34 : 41] And what is it that made the difference? It was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Because in the times of ignorance, that's before the Messiah came and made that payment for sin, God winked at, God overlooked.

I don't know how to interpret that other than to say, God did not hold humanity as responsible before the death of Christ that he does now.

In other words, the crucifixion of Christ, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, everything changed. Brought in a whole new situation. Because now, as opposed to before, now, there is a really concrete message to preach.

And that is, Christ died for our sins. You couldn't preach that message before he did it. but once he did it, that became the message. I delivered unto you that which first of all I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried third day, rose from the dead, according to us.

That's become the message. And that's what he's preaching everywhere he goes. It is the life-giving message. And you know what? It's still the message.

[35 : 59] It's still the message. Dan? If the Gentiles be more receptive to this, after all, the law was for the Jews, it wasn't, and he was saying, there's hope for you, for the Gentiles.

Oh, really? Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, we're just as good as they are. Absolutely. Excellent point that you made because the difference here is really remarkable.

What was there that was available for the Gentiles before the death, burial, resurrection, of Christ? Nothing. Nothing. What were they into? They were into pure paganism all the way.

Joe? They had all these gods, and that's how he got to these intelligent people. They had an unknown god, and he pointed out to them, this unknown god is the real god.

This is the god you should be worshipping. He is the one I came to tell you about. Yeah, and that's how he got to them with the gospel. Right, and before that, they were of course just given to paganism, worshipped many idols, and when Paul went to Athens, he saw these statues, these gods.

[37 : 02] You've even got a god statue there, and you don't even have a name for him, and it says this is to the unknown god, and you've even included him in case you left out one of your gods.

You didn't want him to be offended and get ticked at you, so you said, hey, if you're out there somewhere, and you're an unknown god, we don't know who you are, this is you, this is yours, okay? And that was designed to appease them.

But in Ephesians 2, he talks about the plight of the Gentiles before, and it's not a very pretty picture. He says that they were without God, without Christ, without hope in this present world.

But now, but now, now that Christ has died for the sins of the world, now there is hope for you, now there is a message for you, now you, you non-Jews, can come to faith in Jesus Christ because he is the Messiah of the world, not just of the Jews.

So it's a wonderful thing. Well, I'm sorry we didn't get further and I didn't get to what I intended for this morning, but maybe we got where we needed to be anyway.