

Acts Chapter 17

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[0 : 00] Well guys, here we are. Tomorrow is Valentine's Day, and I trust that you've made ample provision for yourself and your sweetie, whatever that might be. But if you haven't gotten your Valentine yet, or gotten those items underway, it's probably too late to do anything online.

It might come to this. You just may have to go shopping. So, whatever. Make sure you don't overlook that. We are in Acts chapter 17. Seems like we've been there for a long time. We're trying to move along.

The Apostle Paul is out of the synagogue now, and he is in a venue that is completely non-Jewish. He is in a position where he is dealing strictly with Gentiles.

And that makes an important distinction necessary for the way he approaches them. Because before, when Paul would arrive in a new town, the first thing he would do was head for the synagogue.

He knew that there would be a constituency of people there who were very familiar with Moses and the law and the background of Judaism and all the rest. So, they had a common footing, and he could address them on those commonalities.

[1 : 15] And, of course, when Paul arrived in any town, in any synagogue, all he had at his disposal was the Old Testament. New Testament had not yet even been written.

But it was always adequate. And there was a point of reference there that everybody could identify with if you were a Jew. But now, things are different. And we read in verse 17 of Acts chapter 17, and we've got a little number, page number 549 down there on the right-hand corner, that verse 17 says that he disputed in the synagogue with the Jews.

He reasoned with them. He argued with them. They had discussions. And, of course, he was talking about Christ in the Old Testament and pointing him out. And this went on in the market daily.

And then, verse 18 says, Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics, and we won't go into those philosophies because that would just be too time-consuming, but they encountered him.

And they said, What will this babbler say? They considered him as not only an outsider, but someone who has some strange, weird doctrines to share.

[2 : 41] And he is talking about stuff that we've never heard of or never even imagined before. And they refer to him as a babbler. Not a very complimentary term.

They refer to him as having scraps of learning or a rag picker or scraps of truth picker, will he have to say. Another one translates it, Norley translates it, What do you suppose this chatterbox has to say or amateur talking?

And Paul talks about his speech being contemptible. His presentation was not polished or anything like that. Don't think of Paul the Apostle as an orator, as one with a silver tongue that everybody hung on every word.

He wasn't. And he admitted that he wasn't. Now, Apollos was. Apollos was a brilliant man, well-learned in the scriptures, articulate, could really crank out the information.

And people were spellbound when Apollos was speaking. But Paul wasn't that way. He said he was slow of speech, and he was uncomfortable in the role. But, what made this man, what and who he was, was his message.

[3 : 50] It was the content. And, it is amazing today, well, I guess it's always been amazing, not just today, but it's always been this way. People have always been too much impressed with the way people say things.

and they lose sight of the fact that it isn't the way he says something, it's the content, it's the truth, it's the information that he has to share that is important.

And I'll never forget our next door lady, lady next door, down on West Columbia Street, where I grew up here in Springfield. And, she attended a large influential church in town, one of the denominational churches.

and she was telling me about the message that her pastor brought for Easter Sunday. And, oh, it was just wonderful. And she went on and on about what a wonderful, eloquent speaker he was, et cetera.

and, and she was saying some things that I thought were really in opposition to the scriptures. And I asked her, I said, well, obviously you were really taken with what, with what he had to say.

[5 : 03] Oh, I was, it was just marvelous. And I said, tell me, how do you, how do you know, how can you be confident of what he said was, was really true? Oh, it, it had to be true.

He just said it so wonderfully. Well, does it have to be true if it is said wonderfully?

You can be very eloquent and spew out a bunch of nonsense or a bunch of lies. And that's what some considered Paul as saying. He seems to be a setter forth of strange gods because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.

They had no idea, no concept of a glorified body. And if you're thinking in terms of a resurrected body, if you take into consideration the morbid issues involved, who in the world would want a body to be resurrected anyway, because they're thinking in terms of a physical body being resurrected from the dead.

And all we can think of is, ooh, who would want anything to do with something like that? But the kind of body that is involved in the resurrection of the dead is a glorified body.

[6 : 20] It's a body that is the same identity as the person who went into the grave, but when they come out with a glorified body as Christ did, it's a whole different game, you know.

Nobody, nobody has ever had a resurrected body since the time Jesus Christ had his. Lazarus was brought back to death, back to life from the dead, but he wasn't brought back with a resurrected body.

And we have every reason to believe that Lazarus had to die again. A resurrected body is not the same as the kind of body that Lazarus had. A resurrected body is a new body.

The incorruptible has put on incorruption. The mortal has put on immortality. It's a glorious body, and ours will one day be like that, fashioned under the body of Christ.

So, when Paul was talking to them about the resurrection of the dead, that was not at all appealing. What is this guy talking about anyway? So, the text goes on to say that they took him, they arrested him, took him by the sleeve, if you will, they led him, brought him unto Areopagus.

[7 : 32] This is Mars Hill. This is in the city of Athens, and be reminded, this is the singular spot in the world for the intellectual.

This was the nest of higher learning, and high IQs, and great philosophy, great minds, great thinking, of the whole world as it existed at that time.

This is the same place that produced Aristotle, and Socrates, and Plato. These were the intelligentsia.

They were the intellectual elite. And let me just inject something here. Intellectuality, great learning, is no substitute for common sense.

And, the Bible sets forth a revelation that sometimes contradicts public opinion, or what we accept as, you know, what we accept as truth across the board.

[8 : 38] And the Bible sets forth a record of information that often goes against the best conventional learning that is available. And I don't want anybody to think that I'm opposed to education, because I'm certainly not.

My attitude about education is, get all you can. You know, learn as much as you can learn. But if the education is not based on the truth that God has revealed in His Word, then it is education that will lead you astray.

My advice to young people is, and for that matter, older people as well, is get all the education. I admire people who have a Ph.D. degree. I really do. Because it means they have exercised the discipline and met the requirements to excel in their field of expertise and go right to the top.

And it is not an easy thing to get a Ph.D. But I had a Ph.D. tell me one time that he really respects the academia and learning and all the rest.

He says, but I don't, he said, I do have to admit that I have encountered a number of Ph.D.s. And as far as I'm concerned, their degree means nothing but piled higher and deeper.

[9 : 55] And sometimes that's what it is. But a Ph.D. can be a very well-respected and hard-earned accomplishment. So our hat's off to education.

We need all we can get. But at the same time, as Paul will realize here when he is confronting these Athenians and philosophers, that a keen intellect, a keen intellect, humanly speaking, is certainly no guarantee for their arrival of truth.

And this is something that is difficult for people to grasp. They do not realize, and I've said this before, but let me emphasize it again, fellas, it's really, really important, that in our fallenness, I mean, in our moral and spiritual fallenness that began with Adam and Eve and that was transmitted to every generation since, we function and think with a fallen intellect.

Our reasoning powers are skewed from the time we are born. And this is what allows faulty premises and faulty conclusions and wrong thinking and wrong decisions and all the rest.

We think with a compromised mind. And the only thing that can straighten out that compromised mind and put us on the right path is the truth that is set forth in the Word of God.

[11 : 28] And we're not going to go to it now, but I would encourage you to read the first couple of chapters of 1 Corinthians and you'll see the wisdom of man compared to the wisdom of God and set forth there and they can be poles apart.

So, our thinking needs to be adjusted, needs to be revised, needs to be modified to be in keeping with the truth that God has set forth in His Word.

And this is why when many times when the gospel is preached, Paul said, writing to these same Corinthians by the way, he says, when the gospel is preached, many times it comes across as complete nonsense to those on the receiving end.

He says, to the Jew, it's a scandal. To the Greek, the intellectual, and these are who he's talking about here, that's who these people are in Greece, the intellectual, it comes across as nonsensical. And the word that's used, the word that's used in the original is the word from which we get the word moron. And this gospel presents, comes across to these people as moronic, stupid.

[12 : 45] And the Greek would reason this way, you mean to tell me, you mean to tell me that a man who was not clever enough to keep himself from being crucified on a Roman cross is supposed to be the Savior of the world?

Something there doesn't compute. That's the craziest thing I ever heard. He couldn't even manage to save himself and he's supposed to be the Savior of the world?

And then he says, and to the Jew, it's a stumbling block. And the Jew could not compute the idea that God's Messiah could end up on a Roman cross.

That is the dumbest, most inconsistent thing I've ever heard of. And this is why Paul says, to the Greeks, the gospel is foolishness, moronic. And to the Jew, it's a stumbling block.

But to those who are saved, it is the wisdom of God and the power of God. And that is all wrapped up in this gospel. Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it, and it alone, is the power of God through faith unto salvation to everyone one who believes.

[14 : 01] So man may look upon it as stupid, as moronic, or whatever, but what he's doing is casting his judgment upon what the scriptures refer to as the very wisdom of God.

And it is the most glorious thing that ever happened. So now, he's got a new audience and a new challenge because these people don't have any truck at all with the Old Testament.

These people are steeped in thinking, human thinking, human wisdom, human philosophy, and no doubt some of them had outstanding minds, probably high IQs.

But a high IQ is no guarantee for arriving at spiritual truth. So we are told that when they brought him to the Areopagus or Mars Hill, and I was there a couple of years ago, and the place, of course, is just reeking with history, and to think that you could stand, we don't know that we stood exactly where Paul stood when he delivered his message, but it's the highest point in the area, and that's why it's called the Acropolis and Mars Hill, and to realize what took place there a couple of thousand years ago is just an amazing thing.

So in verse 21, in verse 19, may we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest is. For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears.

[15 : 29] And the bold print, I would remind you, is the King James Version here. And they go on to say, we would know, therefore, what these things mean. And then he tells us something about why they are ordinarily gathered there.

Verse 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.

This sounds like a, maybe like a huge liar's bench. You all know just about every little community has downtown a bench where some of the locals get together.

They, of course, are of the retired variety, the only ones who can afford to do that. And they just sit there and spin their stories and tell their tales and lie one to another about this or that. So they call it the liar's bench.

These guys are steeped in philosophy. And their objective is to see if they can come up with some new thing, some new idea, some new concept.

[16:34] And it tickles the fancy and the intellect of these people. And they would sit around and discuss all kinds of issues, most of which could not be resolved or proved one way or another, but it was just an interesting intellectual exercise.

And they thrived on that. So that's what these guys did on a daily pastime basis. And now, this new guy has come to town. And we've heard some really weird things brought up by guys here.

But this guy named Paul, he seems to take the cake. I mean, he is actually in an area that we had never heard of before. So this is going to tickle their fancy.

And they want an audience with him. And they're going to pick his brain and they want him to talk about this new fangled idea that he's got. And they are quite fascinated with it.

And then, verse 22, Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said, you men of Athens. We don't know how many there were. There may have been a dozen.

[17:35] There may have been 40 or 50. We just don't know. He says, I perceive that in all things you are too religious. That's not really a very good translation there in the King James.

Actually, what he is doing is he is giving them a compliment. And it doesn't come across that way in the English in the King James there.

But if you look down at Moffat's translation, M-O-F, it's closer to the truth of the Greek. I observe at every turn that you are most religious people.

Goodspeed translates it. From every point of view, I see that you are extremely religious. And Phillips renders it. My own eyes tell me that you are in all respects an extremely religious people.

Other translations are close to that. And then he goes on to say what brought him to that conclusion. He says, As I arrived here in Athens, and as I was walking through your fine city, I noticed a demonstration of your respect for religion.

[18:45] I found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God, whom, therefore, you ignorantly worship. And to give you a little bit of background, these people, these Athenians, philosophers, brilliant people, and this gives you an idea of how human brilliance and human enlightenment is no guarantee for truth, because these people were all polytheists.

They worshipped multiple gods, lots of deities. Romans, Rome had her deities, and the Greeks had their deities, and there were probably at least a dozen that were well known.

I mean, we're talking about Zeus, and Athena, and Hera, and Hercules, and on and on and on.

They had a whole list of gods. And in the town of Athens, on just about every street corner, there was a statue. statue. And the name of that god was beneath the statue.

And people would actually leave flowers and offerings and things like that at those statues. Their idea was that the universe is so huge and so awesome that multiple deities were needed to care for everything.

[20:12] So they had a god of the sea called Neptune, or Poseidon, and they had a god of the harvest, and a god of the hunt, and a god of this, and a god of that.

They even had a god or a goddess of love. You've heard of Cupid. That was a Greek god. And numerous ones that correlated with the Greek and the Romans and so on.

So here are these supposedly most intelligent people in the whole world worshipping all of these multiple gods. gods, and their concept of god, of deity, was they were much like humans, only stronger and smarter.

That's all. And of course, the gods married and had little gods. And all of these gods were stashed away someplace in their own private realm that no mere mortal knew of.

And the idea was you don't get on the wrong side of one of the gods, because they can do you harm. And if you offend one of the gods, you'll regret it.

[21 : 21] If you offend the goddess of love, and one of them was Eros, as well as Cupid and Diana and so on. Eros is the word from which we get the word erotic, and it has reference to sexual love.

If you offend the god Eros, you might just become impotent, because they are the ones who were in charge of that kind of thing. So they would make offerings and paid homage to these different deities, and it was just part of the superstition.

And yet, you get that kind of attitude from supposedly the most important, educated, enlightened people in the world. And Paul is going to go there and say, I noticed one of your statues didn't have a personal name attached to it, and it was called to the unknown god.

So, you folks are really religious. You even were wise enough to think in terms of having a statue made to a god you didn't even know just in case he was there and you didn't want him left out.

So, you didn't want this unknown god to become angry with you. So, to cover the bases and make sure you didn't leave anybody out, you even, I guess we would say, you created a John Doe god.

[22 : 52] A god to represent everybody. To make sure that you're not going to make anybody mad or offend anybody. And you call this to the unknown god. Well, fellas, let me tell you something. that's the god I came here to tell you about.

This god that you do not know. There is such a god, and I want to introduce you to him. And, of course, he's speaking about the person of Christ.

He goes on to say, these altars with the inscription whom you ignorantly worship, him, declare I unto you.

That's the very reason I'm here, to tell you about this god. And, I'm sorry, we ran out of content. I'll just have to return, I've got another sheet here.

Let me, I should have given those out. I didn't know that we'd get that far, because we usually don't, but take those and take these.

[23 : 54] Just pass that out, if you would. I'm trying to make better time going through Acts 17 because I would like to be able to finish this book, really.

So, he says, what therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. And now he's going to go on and tell them about this god. Verse 24, chapter 17, the god who made the world and all things in it.

And of course, he is a singular god. He is not one of multiple gods such as you've been worshipping. He is lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in temples made with hands. Neither is he served by human hands as though he needed anything. In other words, this god is self sufficient and self-contained as opposed to the gods.

You know, they very much humanized their gods. Their gods had banquets and sat around and ate grapes and drank wine and stuff like this.

[25 : 06] And there would be conflicts among the gods and sometimes they would have a disagreement and it was just kind of nonsensical. But their concept was to humanize their gods.

And he goes on to say, lost my place here. In verse 26, and he made them one, every nation, he made them from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.

And if you want to go back and see some verification of that, you need to consult Genesis chapter 10 that has to do with the placement of the nations as a result of the conclusion of the flood and the tower of Babel.

And that involves verse 26. And verse 27, 27, and that they should seek God if perhaps they might grope for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us.

For in him we live and move and exist. And even some of your own poets have said, for we also are his offspring. Now, what I would like to throw out to you, by way of a question, I want you to consider this.

[26 : 30] What does he mean in verse 27 when he says they should seek God if perhaps they might grope for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us.

How is that? He is not far from each one of us. Do we not sometimes tend to think of God as being very distant, very removed, very far off?

Richard? Was this before the Holy Spirit was there? He was addressing those people. Was this after the Holy Spirit?

Well, the Holy Spirit in the way that he came in Acts 2 is way before this. Several years before this. But we have no reason to the Holy Spirit indwells as very close to us.

Yeah. Well, the Holy Spirit indwells believers. The Holy Spirit indwells only believers. These are not believers. These are pagans. They are polytheistic pagans.

[27 : 37] They are very intellectual, very well educated, but there's no reason to assume that there is even one believer among them. And that presents the challenge. So what do you think he's talking about when he says this God is not very far from us?

Is that called omnipresent? Is that the correct term for it? Well, yeah, God is omnipresent. That means he's everywhere at one and the same time, which is a concept that we can't begin to fathom. But he's omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.

Roger? Yeah, yeah, I think that's involved too. Absolutely. Let me ask you this.

How does anyone connect with God? Where does this belief originate?

[28 : 40] From within. Connection with the deity is as close as you are to yourself. We believe on the basis of what is transpiring in our mind.

We hear or become familiar with a concept and we process the information and we reach a conclusion. This is what every person does who has ever come to faith.

faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God. That's why we preach the gospel. It's to enlighten, it's to give people information so that they can process that information and reach a conclusion and make a decision.

I want to read you a passage here in Romans 10. In verse 6, Paul says, the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven.

That is, to bring Christ down. Or who will descend into the abyss, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say?

[29 : 57] The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart. That is, the word of faith which we are preaching. That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

Where do you have to go to do that? Nowhere! You don't even have to go across the street. You don't have to go to church. You don't have to go up to heaven to personally interact with Christ. The ability to connect with God is within you. That's what he means when he says he's not far from any of us. It is a decision that is made with the human will, the human mind, the human intellect. We hear the information, that's the gospel. And when we preach the gospel to people, all we are doing is imparting information. We're saying, Christ died for your sin.

That's information. What are you going to do about that? You take that information in, you mull it over, you process it, you think about it, pros and cons, is this believable, is this true, is this authentic?

[31 : 10] And some people say, no, it isn't, I don't buy it. And they reject it. That happens a lot. In fact, I have observed over the years in preaching the gospel, very, very few people embrace the gospel when they first hear it.

Very few. Some do, but they are rare. And the reason they don't is because it contradicts what they've always believed.

And that's a perfectly natural thing because we grow up from childhood with a set of values and a set of beliefs and a set of things that we consider to be true and acceptable.

And those become entrenched in our thinking. And then we hear something that completely contradicts that. and it creates a tension in our mind.

Well, now, wait a minute. That doesn't square with what I've always believed. And perhaps the most common example we could give of this is that from earliest childhood, we start learning that what really counts in life is your performance.

[32 : 28] because a good performance is rewarded, a bad performance is punished. And the most natural thing in the world is to transfer that right over to our connection with God.

We know that good behavior with our parents pleases them and they reward that. And we also know that they punish bad behavior, whether it's a spanking or a time out or whatever.

So we bring that right into our connection with God and we think that in order to please God, we need to give God God our heart will love love and elevate Christ and our heart is Lord and hope God will harm into our our connection and God and to each