

Acts Chapter 28

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[0 : 0 0] I think this is for the last time now. We will ask you to turn to this sheet that closes out the Acts of the Apostles. And next Sunday, being Thanksgiving, we will have a completely different kind of message.

That will be more in keeping with the day, and then following that we'll be into some other material that we'll share with you later. What I would like to spend the rest of our time doing this morning is having a discussion that I would like you to feel free to participate in.

And that has to do with these last few verses in Acts chapter 28. In particular, the parting words that the Apostle Paul had as he gathered together this group.

We are not told how large it was, but it was a group of fellow Jews who were residing there in Rome, where Paul has just recently arrived.

And he called and invited them in. And we see on this last page, on page 643, if you will, that as a result, verse 23, it says, They appointed him a day, and there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus.

[1 : 2 5] And I want you to focus on that word, if you will, persuading. It's translated in different ways. Tried to convince them, or having discourses with them, attempting to persuade them.

That's what we do with the gospel. We attempt to persuade people. We attempt to convince people that Jesus is the Messiah.

He is the Savior that God sent. And he sent him for the express reason of saving us from our sins. Therefore, we need to put our faith and trust in that Savior in order to be saved from our sins.

That is the gospel message. And that's what we are trying to persuade people about. But, some people don't want to be persuaded of that. Some already have their mind made up regarding something else.

And that's precisely what the Apostle Paul is facing here. Because we read that he talked to them, tried to persuade them, out of the law of Moses, using the Scriptures, and out of the prophets, using the Scriptures, from morning till evening.

[2 : 3 0] This was a day-long Bible conference. And some, here's the result. Some believed the things which were spoken. And some believed not.

So, Paul's attempt to persuade didn't work as far as some of them were concerned. On the other hand, one never knows. Because a person may hear the gospel today, reject it today, but he can't get away from it.

He can't get away from what he's heard. And maybe tomorrow, or a week later, or a year later, he will recall that conversation, or the arguments that were made, and be more susceptible to the gospel.

Not only that, fellas, but this needs to be taken into consideration, too. And this is why the sowing of the seed is so important. A person may hear the gospel today, and have absolutely no interest at all.

And he just turns it off. But a week from now, something may occur in his life. Some kind of crisis that causes him, brings him up short, makes him stop and really think.

[3 : 43] Maybe it's a close call in an automobile accident or something. And he is confronted with the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of his mortality.

And he caused to think more seriously about something that he just flipped off before, and wouldn't give it any consideration. Someone has said that probably more people come to faith in a crisis of some kind than they do when everything is just nice and smooth and routine.

You know, everything is okay. But it's when we have a close call, or when we come down with a serious illness, or when we have a deep, hurtful loss of some kind.

Our circumstances change. And that's why the sowing of the seed is important, even though you may think that somebody, oh, I'm not going to talk to so-and-so about the gospel because I know he wouldn't be interested.

Well, it's very possible that he wouldn't be interested now. But who knows what's going to come into his life next week or next month. So we need to take opportunity, as Paul said, in season and out of season, to share the Word of God.

[4 : 56] And Paul is doing that here with these people. And some believe the things which were spoken, and some believe not. And when they agreed not among themselves, in other words, the group is divided.

Some of them say, you know, I hear what he's saying, and it makes sense to me. I've connected the dots. I think he's right about his interpretation of these passages in Moses and in the prophets.

It fits Jesus of Nazareth to a T. And I can't deny it, and I'm going with him. I'm going to believe, indeed, he was the Savior. And God did send him.

And the person next to him would say, well, I think you're nuts. I'm not convinced at all. I'm not buying it. And on and on. So you get that kind of response among these people. And we are told that some believed and some believed not.

And they agreed not among themselves. They departed. But not until Paul had leveled this last word as they were preparing to go out the door.

[6 : 01] After that, Paul had spoken one word. And here's what he said. It's another passage of Scripture. And by the way, Paul's persuading them was not from his logic.

Not from his reasoning. But from the Scriptures. In fact, it wasn't even from Paul's experience. He was not telling these people, you should believe because I believe.

That's not good enough. People need a better rationale than that. And when you say, you should believe Christ is the Savior and put your faith in him because I did. Well, what makes you so special?

What makes you infallible? We are not the authority. You should believe because it's true. That's the basis for committing to anything, no matter what it is.

It's because you understand it and accept it to be true. That's what makes it worthy of your belief. And then Paul said, well spoke the Holy Ghost.

[7 : 08] In other words, the Holy Spirit really knew what he was saying when he inspired these words. That Isaiah the prophet spoke unto our fathers.

And these, of course, were their fathers of several hundred years ago. Isaiah's ministry was about approximately 700 years before Christ was ever born.

And yet Isaiah spoke of him in very clear, uncertain terms. And this is what Isaiah said to his constituency at that time.

And now Paul is saying the same thing to his. God said to Isaiah, go unto this people and say, hearing you shall hear and shall not understand.

And seeing you shall see and not perceive. Four, why is that? Why is it that they can see and hear, but they aren't understanding?

[8 : 13] They aren't getting it. What is it that's keeping them from getting it? Connecting the dots. It is because the heart of this people is wax gross.

The 20th century New Testament. See that TCNT there below? Has it more accurately insofar as the meaning is concerned. The mind of this nation has grown dense.

And Isaiah, of course, was talking about the Jewish nation. And so many times the Scriptures use the word heart. And it is talking about the center and the core of our affections.

As we use the word the heart of the matter. Or we say, in my heart of hearts, I believe that. And we all understand that nobody is talking about the blood pump in the chest that sends blood coursing throughout your body.

That's the physical heart. But the biblical heart, more often than not, is in reference to the whole of your inner core. Your thinking processes.

[9 : 21] Your reasoning and logic processes. That's what is skewed. And that's what Paul was talking about when he wrote to the Corinthians and said, If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, whose minds have been blinded.

Now, we ordinarily don't think of minds being blinded. We think of eyes being blinded. But there is a blinding for the mind, too. Because the mind, by the way, you realize that speaking of eyes and the mind and the heart and the brain and all of that, you realize you do not see with your eyes.

I don't know if you're aware of that or not, but you don't. You do not see with your eyes. You see with your brain. All your eyes do is serve as a window to let the image that you are looking at in, and it sends a picture of that image to the brain.

And the brain interprets what you see. Works the same way with the ears. Your ears are not what you really hear with. You hear with your brain.

But the impulse, the waves, the sound waves go through the ears in the same way that the visual image goes through the eyes as a window.

[10 : 51] But it's the brain that tells you what you're looking at and what you're listening to. And the brain is the physical part of which the non-physical part is the mind.

And the mind and the brain work in concert in a way that we don't understand because one is material and one is immaterial, but we know they do get together and they function together. And Paul says that the God of this world, Satan, has blinded the minds.

He throws an impediment in there that keeps them from seeing and hearing what the truth really is. He obfuscates.

He confounds. He confuses. He addles. He mixes up so that people don't really get the true message and are not able to comprehend it.

And that, fellas, plus the fact, and I've made this point before, I think it's a very, very valid point and very important. When our first parents fell, they fell in their entirety.

[11 : 59] When they experienced that moral failure, they cut themselves off from their connection and their fellowship with God, and they took unto themselves a kind of nature that God did not put in them when he created them.

It became a sin nature. God didn't create them that way. They took it upon them when they disobeyed him, and they changed their very constitution morally.

That's what we refer to as the fall. And what I am saying is, and it's important to understand, that the mind, the thinking processes fell with them.

And logic is no longer pure. And truth is no longer simple. Things become more complex. This is exactly what Paul was talking about when he said, The gospel that we preach is foolishness to those who are perishing.

Those who have never embraced the gospel, when they hear the gospel, they say, ah, come on, get out of here. I don't believe that stuff. The word for foolishness in the Greek is the word from which we get the English word moron.

[13 : 27] That's moronic. That's stupid. You're telling me that the God of creation, the God of heaven and earth, became a man and came down to this earth and lived among us and died on the cross for the sins of the world, and the third day rose again for that.

I don't buy that stuff. I don't buy that at all. Well, they're not supposed to buy it outright. They're not supposed to. Because it does come across as foolishness.

To the Greeks, it's foolishness. To the Jew, Paul said, it's a stumbling block. It was a stumbling block to him. He fell all over. He didn't see that gospel. It doesn't make any sense to me.

But when that light did break through, and for him, it had to be a light from heaven on that Damascus road that just absolutely bowled him over. Now, most people don't have that kind of an experience, a Damascus road experience, but sometimes that's what it takes.

So we've got the blindness of the human mind. It is obtuse to spiritual things.

[14 : 34] And we've got Satan throwing a monkey wrench into everything and preventing people from hearing the truth and obfuscating it when they do and ridiculing it and denying it, etc.

So those two elements, what it boils down to is that man has got two strikes against him. His own flawed reasoning powers that lead him astray in his thinking, plus the adversary who wants to make sure he stays that way.

And there's only one thing that can overcome that. And that's why Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, to everyone who believes.

And all that's saying is, it is this gospel that is the only thing that can overcome those two strikes that man has against him.

And even then, it usually takes repeated hearings. You know, the gospel can be like a spiritual battering ram breaking down a hardened heart, coming against that door, and each time they hear the gospel, and each time there is exposure to the truth, it's like God's spiritual battering ram banging on the door of that heart.

[16 : 01] And eventually, when it breaks through, that's when conversion takes place. That's when people say, I saw the light. I saw the light.

That's what happens when you see that light. These, to whom Paul had been speaking, saw the light. Some of them still didn't. Some of them were still rejecting it.

But, they can't get away from the fact of what he told them. And it will stay with them, and register with them. And they'll be thinking about that, because maybe two weeks later, something will happen, or their wife will say something, or their neighbor will say something, and it will remind them of what Paul said.

And there will be a rerun, or a replay of that. And sometimes, the more they think about it, and the more they dwell on it, a little bit of light starts shining through.

And it is line upon line, precept upon precept, and that's usually the way we come to truth. It's in bits and pieces. And it's that way just about everything.

[17 : 04] That's the learning process. So, that's what's taking place here. And he is actually quoting Isaiah 6-9, and Jesus is going to quote the very same passage to the crowd of Jews to whom he is speaking, both in Matthew 13-14, and it's recorded in Mark 4-12, Luke 8-10, and John 12-40.

So, here's a good question to ask anybody to whom you are speaking about the gospel. And this is a good question that Bill Fay brought out when he was here in the area, and in his book, whenever you have opportunity to share the gospel with someone, a really good question to ask people is this.

If whatever it is that you believe now is not true, would you want to know it? And you know, just that question itself can really get people to thinking?

Because most of us, most of us think along the lines of whatever it is that I believe now is true.

Or I wouldn't believe it. So, wherever they're coming from, whether it is from atheism, or from Catholicism, or Protestantism, or Judaism, or Islam, whatever it is that one embraces, they usually assume, well, of course, I believe it's true.

[18 : 46] That's why I'm that, you know. But, it may bring us up short to at least have the intellectual integrity to ask ourselves, yeah, this is what I believe, but, have I ever really scrutinized it and thought about it so that I really am persuaded that it is true, or do I believe that just because that's what I was raised in?

Am I a Christian just because I was raised in a Christian family? Or am I a Muslim just because I was born of Muslim parents and live in a Muslim country?

Does that make what I believe true? Or is there some way to objectively examine the evidence and see if what I believe is really valid?

Because, you know, we are all subject to error. we are all flawed human beings and you've heard me say before and so say I now again, I don't care what your theology is.

I don't care what your doctrine is or what your beliefs are. You are not 100% on track. You just aren't. I know you aren't because God is the only one who is and you are not Him.

[20 : 14] So, this means that no matter what we believe, there are areas where we're wrong. We're all wrong about some things. But, we just don't know where that is that we're wrong and if we're able to discover that, we ought to change it and we ought to get, we ought to abandon the wrong and embrace the right.

And that's that Bill Fay question. If what you believe now is wrong, would you want to know it? Intellectual integrity would have to say, well, of course, of course.

And if you can show me, please do. And you do me a favor. And that's the value of a Q&A, by the way, because the speaker, whoever he may be, doesn't have all the truth.

And sometimes, there is as much or more truth sitting out there listening than what there is that's speaking. and if you've got truth that you can share with the group, then everybody benefits.

And I'm sure that that's what was going on here, at least in part, because they had some kind of a knockdown drag out. I could just hear the yelling and guys quoting scripture and guys shaking their head and guys nodding their head, yes, back and forth.

[21 : 34] This must have been some real time. So, he says, the heart of this people, their thinking processes, they are settled into this. Their ears are dull of hearing.

And I suspect that if you had asked these guys, I suspect that at least some of these Jews, if you had asked them, if what you believe now is not true, would you want to know it?

The response of some of them would be, it is not possible that what I believe now could not be true. I have absolutely not even one shred of doubt.

Well, that's the meaning of their heart is wax gross, become dense, callous. As I've said, these minds are not merely closed, they are bolted shut.

And it takes quite a battering ram to get through. Just this morning, coming in, I was listening on radio, and it was a news blurb, and one of the current things that they are discussing right now in some of the congressional committees is whether or not men in uniform or women in uniform have the right or the propriety to talk about religion, any religion.

[22 : 50] And so far, it's been pretty much outlawed unless one is a chaplain serving in an official capacity and someone comes to you. And they were talking about about officers sharing their faith, for instance, with enlisted men and how that is not permissible and they have not been permitting it up to now.

As far as I know, they still don't. And yet, you know, there are negatives to that. And I can understand that because you put yourself in the position of, all right, say you're an officer in the military.

Say you're a lieutenant colonel and you've got junior officers under you, lieutenants, captains, et cetera, and enlisted men. And you give your testimony or you give an invitation to someone to trust Christ.

Can you not see the mere presence of rank and superiority there being a factor of intimidation to those lesser officers?

And maybe some of them would even want to use it as a manipulative tool and suck up to the old man by saying they believe what he's saying. And they don't believe it at all.

[24 : 07] But they're just trying to score brownie points. So the idea is it would be stupid to disagree with a superior officer. Of course, you're going to buy whatever he's saying.

And I can see the danger in that. You know, the gospel, the gospel is ours for sharing. And we need to do it. But we do not have a right to intimidate people or to pressure people because we must respect each other's volition, each other's freedom of conscience to believe or not believe.

So this is why, this is just one of many areas where biblical Christianity differs radically from Islam. Biblical Christianity seeks to persuade.

We preach to convince. We implore. We beg people to put their faith and trust in Christ. We invite them to make a decision for Christ.

But to threaten or intimidate or say, as the Muslims do, if you will not embrace Allah and Islam, then you must be subject to fines and you will be a second-class citizen in our culture.

[25 : 30] This is where Islam predominates. And if you will not do that, then your only other alternative is you'll just have to die. And, fellas, these are not idle words that I am speaking.

This is the way it is when the Islamic faith is practiced the way the radicals are practicing it. You do not have a choice. You either submit or you pay the ongoing fine, which is usually pretty atrocious for living there in their community, or you are subject to death and they will see to it that you are put to death.

This is what takes place in countries right now. And by the way, I don't know if you realize this or not, but within, well, it's going on now. It hasn't stopped.

And it has been going on for years, particularly in the Sudan, where Christians have been murdered by the hundreds, put to death by the hundreds, just because they were Christian for no other reason.

And that's going on all over the world in places where Islam predominates. And I don't have to tell you what's going on regarding the ISIS factor in Iraq right now.

[26 : 43] It's for real. So, there needs to be a respect of people's conscience. We need to take the attitude, listen, you really need to receive Christ as your Savior.

And if there was some way that I could make you do it, I would. You should never have that attitude. You should never have that attitude. You say, well, you'd be doing it for their own good.

No, listen, God has gifted us as human beings with the power of volition, with the freedom to exercise your will.

That is a priceless commodity. God Himself respects it. We ought not ever to impose our will upon someone else even when we think it's for their own good.

God, each of us needs the freedom to make decisions for ourselves. That's a very, very valuable thing. Very valuable. And we ought not to seek to overturn that.

[27 : 47] God Himself does not. That's why He provides us with the gospel that people can receive and embrace and believe of their own free will.

Big thing going on in Israel now is what they refer to as proselytism. And the rumor had it, and I find this difficult to believe, but I can see how the opposition could come up with this, that there were Christians who were paying, I mean, with money, paying Jews to commit to Christianity.

Christianity. Well, any true Christian with a little bit of biblical understanding knows that you can't buy people's faith.

You can't pay somebody to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It has to be an act of the freedom of the will. And it is ridiculous to think that the gospel of Christ is for sale and that if you will make a profession of faith in Christ, I'll give you fifty dollars.

Well, I can't imagine any Christian being that unscrupulous and I can't imagine any taker being that gullible, but they are saying that that's what's going on and that's what some people have been charged with.

[29 : 11] I think it's patently ridiculous, but... Yes? Yeah, well, in the first place, that's a very good question.

This one young fellow who, by the way, was a former army ranger and he was there on a mercy mission and an AIDS mission and his captors said that he had converted to Islam before he was beheaded.

We don't know the truth of that. There is a possibility that he did. We can't say that he didn't because we don't know for sure.

There is also the possibility that he said he did just because he thought it would save his life. You would be surprised when you are under a sentence of death what you might be willing to agree to. Or if you are being tortured, you might be surprised to find out that you are not as strong as you think you are when you are subjected to an inordinate amount of pain over a long period of time.

You'd be surprised what you'd be capable of agreeing to. And we don't know the truth of that, but I do know this. The radical Muslims have no compunction about even putting fellow Muslims to death.

[30 : 41] And they are convinced they are justified in doing so because they think the circumstances would please God. So it's a really confused mixed bag out there.

And I have heard this. I have heard that some have been confronted with converting to Islam. And they say they do because all you have to do to become a convert to Islam is what they say is with meaning and with truth say there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.

Period. That's it. That makes you a Muslim. If you really believe what you said, that makes you a Muslim. That's it. And some have done that and then they're put to death.

And when you ask them, why did you kill him? He just converted to Islam. We didn't believe him. We didn't believe him. Well, you know, the guy is at the mercy of somebody else believing him.

And it's a lose-lose situation in Islam. You don't know. You cannot read somebody else's mind but they are of course assuming that they can't. So these are the inconsistencies that are out there regarding Islam and we've just touched on a couple of them.

[31 : 55] So, any other comments or questions? Food is here. Yes, Frank. I was coming back from Detroit on the bus one year ago. I was sitting next to this guy who was blind.

He had just been to the ball game. He'd take a transistor radio with us and the voices were transferring into images in his mind.

And he could see the game up here. Absolutely. Absolutely. That's the way the mind works and it's an amazing thing, really. Well, I think we can consider ourselves finished with Acts now.