



January 28, 2022

Paul's example of using Tact, Wisdom, and Speaking the Truth

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We began our examination of Acts 17 last time, discussing Paul's experiences and challenges at Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

Many times in my life, upon reflection, I'm reminded the Apostle Paul's life was definitely not boring! If there wasn't something exciting happening, it seems that he would make it happen.

We noted that both the citizens and foreigners in Athens *"spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing."* (v.21) Albert Barnes' NT Commentary observes: "Thus Demosthenes represents the Athenians "as inquiring in the place of public resort if there were any NEWS?" (*ti newteron*). Meursius has shown, also, that there were more than three hundred public places in Athens of public resort, where the principal youth and reputable citizens were accustomed to meet for the purpose of conversation and inquiry." The Greek word translated "new thing" is *"kainov"* and the Online Bible Greek Lexicon expounds on the meaning as "fresh, recent . . . unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of." Something about what Paul was telling them seemed to fit this expectation. Maybe some of us today are "news junkies?" It's almost become entertainment to some in this age we live in...

Paul stood in their midst at the Areopagus and told those assembled *"Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious."* The phrase *"very religious"* (NKJV) is translated differently in other translations: "too superstitious" (KJV) "overmuch given to fear of the gods" (BBE) "fearful of gods in everything" (MKJV) "very religious" (RSV) "given up to demon worship" (DBY). The word can apply in a positive sense or a negative sense.

I understand Paul applying it in a more positive or neutral sense in that he told them they were religious but he didn't blast them for being "idolaters" and/or "demon worshippers!"

He then comments *"as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD."* (v.22) He uses this as a launching point to tell them about the one true Creator God who made everything, and whom

they did not really know. He explained that this God does not dwell in man-made temples or buildings like their various gods and goddesses. This God does not need to have statues or idols made for His worship. He does not need offerings or sacrifices or any physical thing that humans can give to maintain His existence.

Paul is contrasting the true God with the many idols and false gods of the Athenians. Albert Barnes' NT Commentary notes on v.25: "The word here rendered worshipped *-yerapeuetai-* denotes to serve; to wait upon; and then to render religious service or homage. There is reference here, undoubtedly, to a notion prevalent among the heathen, that the gods were fed or nourished by the offerings made to them. The idea is prevalent among the Hindus, that the sacrifices which are made, and which are offered in the temples, are consumed by the gods themselves." Sort of like the *myth* that many believe that Santa Claus consumes the treats left for him on Christmas Eve.

Paul goes on in v.26 to expound on the true God as Creator of all humans and Sovereign in His involvement with nations and their destinies.

Again, Albert Barnes' NT Commentary observes: "The design of the apostle in this affirmation was, probably, to convince the Greeks that he regarded them all as brethren; and that, although he was a Jew, yet he was not enslaved to any narrow notions or prejudices in reference to other men. It follows also from this, that no one nation, and no individual, can claim any pre-eminence over others in virtue of birth or blood."

I suggest there is validity to this explanation. It fits with the tenor of Paul's approach of reaching out to the listeners by establishing some common ground and using appropriate words to show good will on his part toward his audience.

But, Paul also brings out several truths about the Creator that stand out from the deficiencies of man-made gods. Robertson's NT Word Pictures comments on v.26: "What Paul affirms is the unity of the human race with a common origin and with God as the Creator. This view runs counter to Greek exclusiveness which treated other races as barbarians and to Jewish pride which treated other nations as heathen or pagan (the Jews were *laos*, the Gentiles *ethnê*)." Paul is avoiding coming across either personally or ethnically as prideful or better than the Greeks or others from other nations in his audience.

We'll continue our review of this chapter next time. Paul sets an excellent example for you and me of using tact, wisdom, and speaking the truth in love, when interacting with others...

Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Hoefker', written over a circular scribble.

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