

## INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: [Acts 17:16-34](#).
- B. If, 100 years ago, we would have said:
  - 1. Men will fly around the earth in less than 24 hours.
  - 2. The US will land men on the moon and return to the earth.
  - 3. By telephone you can talk to someone by satellite.
  - 4. Pictures can be sent to your home through the air (TV)....these would have been STRANGE THINGS TO YOUR EARS.
- C. Unfortunately today, when the gospel is preached many think of the message as something strange to their ears.
- D. Paul had the same problem on Mars Hill. Let's look at his sermon.

## I. PAUL LAID SOME GROUND WORK.

- A. "Gloom and doom" preaching doesn't work well; especially in the long run. One must first lay some important foundations to build (preach) on.
- B. People are not converted by "Bible wars."
- C. Paul wanted to speak about the resurrection of X, but because of their various religious backgrounds could not begin at that point (Ac. 17:22-23).  
[And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."](#)
- D. Philosophers of that day viewed things in a circular fashion (like looking all the way around a cup), where we view them in linear fashion. Paul begins to argue around the subject so he can get to X.
- E. These philosophers also liked new things, so they were willing to listen.

## II. PAUL CAPITALIZED ON THEIR DEVOTION.

- A. As a Jew, Paul was provoked in his spirit (very upset) in seeing the idols all over Athens. Jews despise idol worship (Ac. 17:16).  
[Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.](#)
- B. Because of this devotion, he calls them "religious" a term which can also mean superstitious. To be superstitious is to believe something that is not supported by fact or testing.
- C. But he was able to use their devotion to their superstitions to begin his sermon. This could be some common ground to work with.
- D. Our lesson is that we need to get-to-know those whom we are studying with so we can better meet their needs.

## III. PAUL PREACHED A POSITIVE SERMON.

- A. The apostle could have said many negative things about the vanity of idol worship. But he didn't.
- B. We usually don't get very far in converting people if we alienate them.
- C. Instead of condemning that which is false, elevate that which is good. By teaching the truth in a positive way, one automatically rules out that which is negative and false.
- D. We must "lift Jesus up" (Jn. 12:32-33).  
["And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die."](#)

- E. Paul's sermon dealt with;
1. The nature of God (17:24-25, 29).  
 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; **25** neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;... **29** Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."
  2. The nature of the creation (17:26-28).  
 and He made 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, **27** 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; **28** for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'
  3. The response of the creation (17:30-31).  
 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, **31** because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
- F. Remember, with all of this Paul is "circling" to get back to the resurrection of X, which is really what he wants to talk about.

#### IV. PAUL ISSUED A CHALLENGE.

- A. This challenge comes in 17:30; to go from ignorance to education and then to repentance.
- B. Paul knew their current way of life was wrong. He challenged them to change their philosophy from that of the Epicurean or Stoic and become Xians.
- C. Epicurean philosophy basically taught that pleasure (the absence of suffering, fears, and pain) was considered the highest good and the true goal of the philosophic journey. Stoic philosophy believed that god was everywhere in the universe and when one lives in harmony with nature (rejecting fear, compassion, pathos, pain, and ethics) one found the highest good.
- D. Yet all of this is basically a form of agnosticism in that they would not allow themselves to comprehend that there is a supreme creator who must be worshipped. The term "unknown" is the same Greek word for agnostic.

#### V. PAUL GAVE THE PEOPLE A PROMISE.

- A. The promise was that JC would return to judge the world.
- B. A day of judgment, whereby the works of men would be taken into account and measured against righteousness.
- C. The proof of the promise is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.
- D. The Day of Judgment will be salvation to the faithful, but damnation to the unrighteous.
- E. Paul is urging the people to make "THE UNKNOWN GOD" -- Jehovah God.
- F. Our lesson is that we need not use the judgment like a club to beat people spiritually. Yet, it is something that should be used to get people to reflect on their relationship with God (Ac. 17:31-32).  
 "...because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." **32** Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

#### CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. Let us review again what Paul said in his sermon on Mars Hill. It will help us in our preaching and teaching others. He:
  1. Used the surroundings, no matter how sinful, to teach about X.
  2. Preached a positive sermon.
  3. Issued a challenge to the people.
  4. Gave a promise of God the people could believe in.
  5. Taught about X and His resurrection as proof.

- B. What happened as a result of Paul's sermon? Two things:
1. Some people rejected the message (17:32a).  
Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer,...
  2. Some people accepted the message, and wanted to know more (17:32b,34).  
but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." **34** But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.
- C. We can expect the same results to today.
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.