

Church – The Beginnings, Part 51

Paul's Mission to Athens – Part 2

Acts 17:15-21 | 10/22/2017

NEW LIFE FELLOWSHIP

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Act 17:15-21

Those who were caring for Paul's safety went with him as far as Athens, and then left him, taking a message from him to Silas and Timothy, asking them to join him as speedily as possible (i.e.: ASAP).

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was stirred within him when he noticed that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ [Therefore] he had discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and the other worshippers [i.e.: Gentile Converts and Gentile God-Fearers], and in the market place, day after day, with those whom he happened to meet. [from 1912 Weymouth New Testament]

¹⁸ And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus AND the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so, we want to know what these things mean." ²¹ (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) [NASB]

1. After sharing the Gospel in the Synagogue and in the Agora (the Market Place) – Paul met some Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers who discussed, conversed, and debated with Paul. They called him a "idle babbler", "vain babbler", or a "beggarly babbler" ... but the word is: σπερμολόγος - (spermológos): generic: spermolóbou, masc.-fem., spermolóngon, adj. from spérma (G4690), a seed, and légo (G3004), to collect, gather. Used as a substitute for: a trifler, babbler, chatterer who picks up and repeats trifling things (Act 17:18). It is said that the Athenians applied this name to those who made their living by collecting and selling refuse they found in the market places. Therefore, they were men of no account, low and contemptible persons.

Syn.: mataiológos (G3151), vain talker; katálalos (G2637), slanderer.

(from "The Complete WordStudy Dictionary")

So, at first, when the Epicureans and Stoics heard Paul talking with people and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Resurrection – they thought that he was some lowly beggar, sharing things just so he could get a piece of bread – babbling on about things, etc. But, then as they listened they noticed he was speaking well, articulating a "new teaching". Then they engaged him in conversation, discussions, and debate. The first impressions were changed to → this is a guy I need to let others in our exclusive group know about.

So, sometimes folks see us with their **first impressions**, and may have disparaging views about us, about our character and what we are sharing. This did not stop Paul from continuing on with his sharing of the Gospel with them. He kept on conversing, discussing and debating with these Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers and Paul actually caused these folks to change their minds about Paul and his teachings. So, don't give up, even if you are slandered and called all kinds of nasty names: continue on with sharing the Gospel with a level head and with your discussion, seasoned with God's kindness and understanding. Remember, these folks we are sharing with are controlled by their old, sinful nature, no matter their social status or education in any society, etc. Paul is an example of how we need to continue on in the midst of ridicule, etc. On the Day of Pentecost - Acts 2 – some said that the apostles in the upper room were drunk with new wine – while others saw something else (i.e. God's Miracles ...) and wanted to learn more. We see that in other instances in the responses of folks to the apostles and their message of the Gospel, etc. So, it is and will be with us – no surprises – eyes wide open.

For more on the Epicurean and the Stoic philosophers that Paul met, please, go to:

<https://biblestudytools.com/dictionary/epicureans/>

<https://biblestudytools.com/dictionary/stoics/>

2. He seems to be preaching strange gods (deities / demons) ...

The word for deities or gods used here is: δαιμόνιον (daimónion) – from which we get the word **DEMON**. It is used as “gods”, god, heathen or foreign god(s) – Jewish meaning is Demon, evil spirit, some spirit subject to Satan, fallen angelic beings, etc. It was not Theos – which is the Generic term for “god” in the Greek Language. So, they were still kind of ridicule Paul in the process.

Why did the Epicureans and Stoics lay that charge against Paul?

Because Paul was preaching the Good News of Jesus

- AND – the Resurrection from the Dead.

To their ears – they were hearing **TWO DISTINCT gods** being proclaimed, as if it were a part of some sort of unified, new teaching:

Jesus (’Ιησοῦς) - AND - the Resurrection (ἀνάστασις – anastasis)

Lesson: No matter how well you present the Gospel (the True News, the Bad News, and the Good News of Jesus Christ → God is Creator, we became Sinners, God is Judge, God sent His son to die for our sins upon the Cross, Jesus rose from the dead, etc.) – some folks might still get the concepts confused and trip over the truth. So, stay with them as they seek to learn more (if they do) – go through Open Doors as long as you can, while the doors stay open.

3. More OPEN Doors because Paul was Faithfully Sharing the Gospel of Christ:

He was faithful – and that faithfulness with sharing the Gospel, no matter what, God used to open more doors for the Gospel.

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Again, we learn, from the apostle Paul, and the other apostles (Peter and John, etc.) – that being faithful, no matter what, is the key to our **life-walk** in Christ. Faithfulness in Trusting and Obeying Christ in all areas of our lives. This is impossible in our own selves. We can try on our own, and we will fail miserably, eventually. We cannot follow Christ in our own strength. That is why Christ commanded His disciples to “deny yourself, take up your Cross, daily, and Follow Me” ... it must be in that order. We must deny our old sinful nature (the old flesh) any influence or rulership in our lives anymore (reckon our old self – dead – in Christ and dead to us) and put on the New SELF – Created New in Christ → Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 3:1-11

It is a surrendered and trusting life-walk with Christ. We must, individually, be fully surrendered unto Christ, Himself, personally. Surrender → all my arguments against Him, my arrogance, my fight, my war – questioning His authority – “if I was God, then ‘thus and so’” as if I could do better etc. – all of that must be settled and laid down at the foot of the blood stained cross – I surrender all – your soul must say – and it must be true. No longer are you king of your life, but Christ is the Only King from that point forward. It is a renewed, daily, surrender – not just a one-time “commitment” – “deny yourself, take up your cross, DAILY, and Follow ME...” (Luke 9:23-26)

We see this exemplified in the apostles Peter, John, and Paul
Lessons to Learn, indeed.

4. Paul was invited to speak – really – he was brought up to the Areopagus (Mars Hill) to speak. This was an exclusive, elite group of Philosophers – who embraced the ancient (and seen as very outdated) beliefs of Epicurean and Stoic philosophies, etc. **Closed Group – Exclusive Group, a Group that some folks would do anything to be a part of.** Influential Group in the community. This is similar to what Jesus dealt with → the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Acts 17:18-21

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The folks in Athens – a Free City in the Roman Empire – were able to a huge allowance of Free Thought and Free Speech without any repercussion (mostly). They were like the people of today in the Western world – they wanted all the New Gadgets, Devices, the Latest News, the Newest Philosophies, Newest Teachings – as 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says – they want their **Ears Tickled** – they don’t want the Truth - per sé – but the coolest sounding kind of thing. They might say – “wow, the way that guy talks, and what he is saying – wow – I need that, or wow I want that” – doesn’t that sound like today’s world we live in?

Look – if this is an OPEN DOOR – go through it. If they’ve never heard what you’re talking about (of course, the Gospel – is what I mean), then by all means, walk through that door, and don’t pull any punches – be nice, loving, kind, relevant – but also be fully truthful in the process, don’t compromise the truth so that you will be liked or received, etc. Paul was not thinking → “well, if I say this a certain way, then they will like me, and give me exclusive club membership” ... Paul was thinking → I live to only please the LORD. But I know folks today that would dumb-down the Gospel and their “Christianity” so that they can fit it – into those kinds of exclusive “clubs” in life – to belong – to fit in.

Jesus said, “If you are ashamed of me, before men, I will be ashamed of you before my Father ...” - or - “If you deny be me, before men, I will deny you before my Father” ... Luke 9:23-26

Paul was fully aware of those pressures, but forged ahead with God’s Truth in their context. Tune in next week as we look at Paul’s Gospel Address before the Areopagus philosophers.