

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***  
*107 East Austin*  
*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*  
*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**A0906 – February 8, 2009 – Acts 14:1-18 – Division Vs. Confusion**

All right, we want to be reminded that the Book of Acts can be divided in three parts on the basis of Acts 1:8. This is Luke's outline, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." So the Book of Acts records how the witness went out, the witness being the objective fact of the resurrection and not the personal subjective experiences of the apostles. They may have had many lovely experiences but it's not their experiences which are the power of God unto salvation, it's the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God unto salvation. And so the gospel went out, according to this verse in three stages; stage one, the witness to Jerusalem, that's chapters 2-7, the witness to Judea and Samaria, the regions around Jerusalem, that's chapters 8-9, and the witness to the remotest part of the earth, that's covered in chapters 10 to the end of the book. Being in chapter 14 we're in stage three, the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth. And in chapter 14 Paul and Barnabas are on the first missionary journey. John Mark has already flaked out and he went home crying to mommy. And the reason he went home crying is because there's a conflict between light and dark, there's a battle for truth and many Christians aren't comfortable fighting for truth so they fade out. But the Bible states unequivocally that we are in a war, a war against princes and principalities of darkness and being that the world is a dark place obviously when you bring light into it and start exposing the wickedness and the deception and the scheming you're going to be attacked. So you might as well accept it, get trained in the word of God and enter the fight, stop laying down and letting the enemy run you over and keeping you subdued. And therefore, when God the Holy Spirit chose the first missionaries, He chose the two believers with the most training. He did not choose John Mark by the way, and when John Mark saw the conflicts he ran home to mommy, simply

because he didn't have the training to control his emotions and he flaked out. He simply needed more training because training is what brings your emotions under control so you can focus on the objective and respond according to protocol and not freak out. Mark wasn't there yet.

Today we start in chapter 14, Iconium, and then we advance down into Lystra. All this in Asia Minor. If you have maps in the back of your Bible, great, if you don't, stop fooling around, get one and familiarize yourself with this territory. The first missionary journey started over here in Syrian Antioch, they advanced down to the port, sailed across to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas' old stomping grounds. They made their way from Salamis over to Paphos, the major cities, then they sailed north to Asia Minor, Paul's old stomping grounds. They skipped out of the lowland regions pretty quickly and on up in the mountains to Pisidian Antioch where Paul delivered his typical sermon to the Jews, which followed the historical framework methodology. And last week the town mayor kicked them out of town and so they head E/SE to Iconium, about 60 miles away.

So let's read the first seven verses to get the flow, Acts 14:1-7, **In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. <sup>2</sup>But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. <sup>3</sup>Therefore they spent a long time *there* speaking boldly *with reliance* upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. <sup>4</sup>But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. <sup>5</sup>And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, <sup>6</sup>they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; <sup>7</sup>and there they continued to preach the gospel.**

Now at Iconium, v 1, they follow precisely the same strategy they did at Antioch. They get to town and find the local **synagogue**. Why the synagogue? Because that's where the Jews were and that's where they at least find people that share the same basic categories of thinking, they share the OT background. At least these people have some idea what you're talking about. When we finish today we're going to see another group that has no

idea what Paul is talking about. But the group at **Iconium** knows very well what Paul is saying and so at Iconium the people divide into two camps, one positive, the other hostile to Paul. So the message got through loud and clear. The other group at Lystra, Paul went in and tried to communicate, did not communicate and it was a disaster. We compare the two today.

The first city, Iconium, Acts 14:1-7, is where they go to the Jewish audience and in verse 1, **they spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed**, now don't let the translation confuse you when it says **they spoke in such a manner**. Paul did not use hocus pocus on these people. All it's saying is that they went through the same kind of message as Acts 13, the very effective approach of the historical framework. Apparently Luke's point in the last chapter is to reveal Paul's basic sermon when he went to a synagogue, if they'd changed it Luke would have noted it. So to **speak in such a manner** means they presented the content of Scripture as an organized unit and not as pieces. That's the biblical method used by all the saints and it's a very effective method. It doesn't guarantee a positive response but it does get a response one way or the other. And at least that way you know you've communicated. On this occasion **a large number of Jews and Greeks believed** and at that moment of faith alone in Christ alone they were justified. Please notice they did nothing other than believe. They didn't get water baptized, they didn't speak in tongues, they didn't walk an aisle or any of the other false additions to the gospel. They simply **believed**.

Now verse 2, here's the other side of the response, positive response of belief in verse 1, negative response of disbelief in verse 2, **But the Jews who disbelieved**. Why? Same reason as Acts 13. God has a plan for history, He wrote the plan and that plan includes a heaven and a hell. You say why? Why did He include hell? Obviously He could have done it another way. Why this way? I don't know why any more than I know why the human race is red and yellow, black and white and not green and purple, blue and orange. You may not like that but I'm sorry, you're a part of history not the author of history. And His history divides the human race. God in His sovereignty decided not to divide the human race on the basis of sex, race or skin color but on the issue of belief or rejection of Jesus Christ. That and that alone is the dividing line. And therefore the word of God, when it goes forth divides people. Yet, think of all we hear today from the so-called Christians. "Oh the Bible is a

sweet little book, Jesus is a sweet little love song, and Jesus came to unite all men under His big umbrella of love.” Excuse me? My Bible says that Jesus Christ did not come to bring peace on earth...but a sword. The word of God divides the human race and the Jews here are split off, they’re dividing, and the thing they’re basing their rejection on is racial, it’s purely racial. We’re the chosen race, we’ve got the Mosaic Law and we’re circumcised. But that’s not the issue. God says the issue is faith or rejection of Jesus Christ, not circumcision, not baptism, not tongues or anything else.

And so they **stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.** In other words they did not try to openly debate Paul and Barnabas. They skipped all that and went straight to the masses and infected them with poison. Put in modern terminology, propaganda, the media lies and deceives, there’s nothing new about the methods of Satan, he’s always stirring up the masses against the few voices of truth.

Verse 3, **Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord.** So in verse 2 you would expect maybe Paul to say uh-oh, things are getting hot, we’d better leave. But oh no, it takes more than just a little bad-mouthing to get rid of Paul. It was because things got hot that verse 3 says they decided to stay there for **a long time.** Paul didn’t let a few hotheads run him out of town. Paul said “I see conflict and I see people getting agitated over the word of God and therefore I’m going to camp here for awhile. What a terrific environment to minister in, I think I’ll stick around and see if I can get them more upset.” So Paul stayed, some scholars think as long as six months and continued to **speak boldly**, he didn’t shrink back, he didn’t tone it down and say, “Oh, now I didn’t mean to cause such strife, I’m sorry, will you forgive me? Probably our differences are just semantics, what if I said it this way. Is that better?” He didn’t tone down the word of God; he toned up the word of God. “Oh, you don’t like that, what do you think about this?” Now why did he do that? Because when he saw the conflict he interpreted that as the word of God making direct hits on Satan’s program. That’s why. And he said, “I’m going to send more missiles and make more direct hits. So he interpreted conflict as “We must be doing something right around here because Satan doesn’t like it.” And so they went on, notice, in **reliance upon the Lord.** What’s that all about? That’s about the source of their strength. They didn’t stand up there and go toe to toe with deeply Satanic people in their flesh. The flesh profits nothing. How do you expect to

defeat evil forces with your evil flesh? Can't be done. But greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world. This is the way the battles are won.

Acts 14:4, the result; the same result wherever and whenever the word of God is taught, **But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.** Now that's what you want. Whenever you're witnessing to someone, whenever you're evangelizing someone on the job or the grocery store, this is the response you want. It's not that you're looking to be stir up strife, it's not that your arguing for arguments sake, it's not that you're looking for a fight. That's the wrong spirit, the wrong attitude. What we're talking about is something different. We're talking about the fact that as you witness you're praying, "Lord, let your word go forth such that there's a clear response. Let me see that I've gotten through to this person such that they accept it or they reject it." The last thing you want is the person all confused. Then I haven't communicated. But if I get a clear response and the person gets on one side of the fence or the other then the word of God has had its dividing effect. That's what you're looking for.

So verse 5, the plot is arranged; it was a lethal plot. **an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them.** By the way, notice what a beautiful set of encouraging circumstances Paul had on this first missionary journey. They go to Antioch and they're told to leave town by the mayor. They come to Iconium and he just about gets stoned. Wouldn't that be enough to turn most people around? Probably. Cyprus was enough to turn John Mark around. Well, what was it then that kept Paul and Barnabas going? One place after another turns him away. Do you know what it was? It was the fact that people in every town responded to the word of God. That's what kept him going; he knew he was on target. You see, Satan did not want the word of God to begin to bring light into his dark world and he tried everything he could to dissuade the early missionaries from going on, but they continued on in spite of it.

But at verse 6, **they became aware of the plot and fled.** At this point, Matt 10:23 comes in to play because Jesus said, "when they persecute you, flee to another city." So up to this point they were facing conflict but it wasn't persecution, now we're talking a plot to assassinate, they ditch town. But Paul evidently made a deep impression on Iconium. It was a long time before

he was forgotten. If you've ever wondered what Paul looked like, we have a resident of Iconium who preserved for us a description of him in the *Acts of Paul*. It's a second century text but we think very accurately preserved. And in the text, a man named Onesiphorus, a resident of Iconium, set out to meet Paul who was on his way to the city, quote, "And he saw Paul approaching, a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man, and at times he had the face of an angel." Which was a way of describing someone who had a stern face, someone who had a very focused mental attitude. Now, how's that for an attractive evangelist? He wasn't a six foot tall, blonde haired and blue eyed Athenian type. He was a short, bald guy with a unibrow. Now maybe that sheds some light for you ladies as to why Paul never got married. He wasn't the most attractive guy on the block. And if we were choosing the spokesman for Christianity we would probably would have never chosen Paul. But God doesn't pick on the basis of physical appearance, God looks on the heart and when it came to communicating His program for history He picked a bald, bow-legged guy because he had it where it counted.

Verse 6, they flee **to the cities of Lycaonia, which are Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;** Now, this is one of those historical notices that led the liberals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to condemn Luke or whoever wrote the Book of Acts, as historical nonsense. For they quoted Cicero and Pliny the Elder to the effect that Lystra was not a city of Lycaonia but Phrygia. See, what you had, in this large province called Galatia, was two districts, the district in the west was Phrygia and the district in the east was Lycaonia. Two different districts run by different political administrations. And because Cicero, Pliny and others say Lystra was Phrygian then obviously Luke's wrong and these historians are right. Well, we've mentioned Sir William Ramsay before. He wrote several books on Paul and Acts, he went into the field and looked at the literary and epigraphic evidence, the epigraphy being any extant writings on monuments, coins and so forth. And he said, when he came to Lystra, "I find exactly what Luke says, that Lystra was in the district of Lycaonia to the east and the last city of Phrygia was Iconium in the west." And therefore, , Luke and Xenophon, who said Iconium was the last city of Phrygia, were right and Cicero and others are the oddballs. Ramsay even goes on to say that it was this verse that convinced him just how accurate a historian Luke was. And since then no one has brought this up to question

Luke's accuracy, now it's all hush, hush you see. Whenever the Bible's in question there's a big to do, when it's resolved in the Bible's favor you don't hear a thing so I bring it to your attention.

So we come to **Lystra**, nothing is said of what happened in **Derbe** or **the surrounding region**, but Lystra we should say is off the beaten path. This is not a cosmopolitan city and therefore we gather that Paul's motive in going there was to find a place of refuge until it was safe to return to Iconium. But while they were **there they continued to preach the gospel**.

Now we come to the smaller town of **Lystra**, verse 8-18. And at this point we want to remember in Acts 13 Paul spoke to the synagogue, he spoke primarily in a Jewish context; we've studied how he approached that. He used the historical framework methodology starting with the Call of Abraham. We want to go back and just mention one thing about that approach because by the end of the day Paul's going to be forced to modify that approach. So let's review how Paul presented the gospel message.

First, in Pisidia we studied how he announced it to people who had some background in the Bible. In Lystra we're going to see how he announces it to people who have no background in the Bible, and he announces it two distinctly different ways. To the Jewish people he begins with the Call of Abraham. The sequence of the great historical events is the Creation, the Fall, the Flood and the Noahic Covenant. With the Jewish people he doesn't have to begin with those first four events; they already know those. Now what importance does that have? Well, it means that they were straight on at least the first four events in the biblical framework. It means that they were straight also on the various doctrines that are built upon those events. They know about Creation, they know the doctrine of God; particularly they knew God was not part of the creation, they know that God isn't co-extensive with the universe. God is distinct from His universe, so they already hold to the Creator-creature distinction. Further they were straight on the doctrine of man, man was a creature made in God's image, they were straight on the doctrine of nature, that nature was under God, nature was God's handiwork. They knew all that from the creation event. Knowing the event of the Fall they were straight on the area of evil and suffering, that the universe wasn't originally evil. God made everything good and by an act of human rebellion, evil and suffering exist. And then because they knew of the global Flood of

Noah and the doctrine of judgment/salvation they knew that God interferes in history and he can interfere in a global way and in a catastrophic way. And finally they knew the Noahic Covenant, that God promised that His word would rule over the cosmos such that there would never be a global Flood again, and therefore it was not natural law that governed the environment, it was the word of God that reigned over the environment.

These things the Jewish people and the God-fearers who met in the synagogue understood, and Paul could take advantage of that so in Acts 13 he doesn't start with all that. The foundation was already laid and he could begin with the Call of Abraham and the doctrine of election, justification and faith. Now we come to a different group. At Lystra there is no synagogue because there were very few Jews there. Mostly it was Roman colonists and officials. So he's dealing with Gentile pagans and therefore when he preaches the word of God to these people he can't be sure they know those first four events; Creation, Fall, Flood and Covenant. So, to introduce Christ to this kind of a crowd you can't start with the Call of Abraham, he's got to get back earlier. But apparently he didn't get back earlier and therefore what they were hearing and what he was saying were two totally different things. What Paul said created a lot of confusion, he did not communicate here. They totally re-interpret Paul's message such that whatever he said is not what they heard. So Paul's going to have to learn how to back up and get into these four events to avoid confusion. So let's start in verse 8 with the healing of this man.

This is the event which triggers the whole problem, a case that is amazingly similar to Peter healing the lame man in Acts 3. There's your homework, go back and compare the two. Now, **At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.** Have you ever noticed when God the Holy Spirit goes to work a miracle he chooses the hardest case. No one can walk away from verse 8 without the sense that this guy is the last person you would expect to walk, the guy wasn't injured last week, the guy had been lame since birth, and another thing, being that the man had never taken a step in his entire life, what else can we assume? That the local people had known this man all their lives. And so when God the Holy Spirit goes to exercise His omnipotence He chooses someone everybody knows and is an absolutely worst case.



Now in v 9, Paul's doing a little teaching, **This man was listening to Paul**, probably Paul was going through his typical Acts 13 message, And this man is deep in thought about what Paul is saying and **when he had fixed his gaze on him**, that is Paul narrows in on this man, he can tell that this man is responding positively to the message such that Paul sees **he had faith to be saved**, same word used of spiritual salvation there. But here referring to physical salvation, he had faith to be saved from his infirmity. Sometimes faith is involved in these healings but don't assume that always, sometimes that's not the case, but here it is. **He had faith to be made well** and so right in the middle of the sermon Paul turns to him and **said with a loud voice, Stand upright on your feet."** **And he leaped up and began to walk.** Now, a great miracle just happened, instantaneously this man who had no muscle memory, no muscle at all by the way, just pure collagen, never crawled as a baby, never rolled over, never walked, never ran, never! And Paul commands **Stand up** and the guy has instant muscle, the guy has instant nerves attached to the muscle, the guy has instant bone mass and instant tendons to connect muscle to the bone and all this comes into place instantaneously. He doesn't even have to learn to walk, he doesn't have to go out and figure out how to put the right foot in front of the left, it's all in place, a marvelous miracle of God. But look at vv 11ff. They have just seen a fact. Paul probably had hundreds of Gentiles listening to him go along and then this happens and then they see this fact and what do they do to the fact? They totally re-interpret it. They all saw the same thing, no one's denying the fact, we've known Joe all our life, he's lame, but now he's not. So we have a fact, but Paul's interpretation of the fact is God has done this; their interpretation of the fact is Paul had done this. And in a way we can see that's true. Paul was involved, they're not completely off their rocker in verse 11. But the rest of the explanation is totally different. What happened? What happened was these people have a totally different framework, worldview or basic set of presuppositions. And in that pagan framework the fact comes in and is filtered through their framework and out comes this wild explanation that's hardly recognizable. Hundreds of people have listened to the apostle Paul and after they have listened to the greatest theologian of the Christian church they have no idea what he said or what happened. Tragically this isn't confined just to Lystra.

I am convinced this goes on day after day in the streets and churches of America. The day when you could go out and give someone a tract and win

them to Christ is over. You can't do that. If you had to sit down and listen to what people say when you talk to them about being a Christian and what is the gospel and how do you go to heaven, basic questions, you'd be amazed what you hear. These people don't understand the gospel, they're confused. They're as confused as these Lystran's. Was it the message that was confusing? Not always, often the message can be perfectly clear. Paul was a very clear preacher. Well, then, what's the problem? The problem is that they have this pagan framework of thinking that interrupts and disrupts the message. Put in radio terms, they're not on the same wavelength. The word "God" comes out of your mouth and travels into their ear and that signal get sent to the brain and the brain has this framework that registers G-o-d, but G-o-d in their brain means "the universe," the God of Spinoza and Einstein, the cosmos, or G-o-d comes in and translates "the cosmic corrector," the deistic god of Jefferson. It goes on and on, you say "God," they translate "cosmos," you say "sin" and that hits the eardrum, goes to the brain, and translates "chaos," "chance," the unknown factors in the world that just happen, there's nothing that can be done about them. It's not my fault, it's just a mistake here and therefore, I'm just a victim. Now, has the gospel gotten through? These people have heard it. Ask them what was said and they'll come out with blah, blah, blah, blah, blah and you think, what went wrong? What went wrong was they had a non-biblical set of presuppositions that took all your words and re-interpreted them into this garbled message. They may even believe the garbled message. Did they believe the gospel? No, they believed their garbled message. Are they saved? Of course not.

Now I'm telling you there are very few Christians who understand what we're talking about here and many who do don't want to hear it. And yet here's Acts 14, right in every Christian's Bible. Does anyone read this stuff? Does anyone pay attention to these warnings? Does anyone care? This is a warning right here. Paul was horrified about what happened here. We're not living in the time of the Billy Graham crusades of the 1950's. Sure, sixty years ago you go in and say God, sin and all the rest of it and people would understand. You could do that because people still had the basic Christian categories. Our country was founded on Reformation principles and until the 1920's and 30's the principles rubbed off on the people of our society such that, whether they were conscious of it or not, they basically thought in Christian terms. Today that's gone; the public de-education system has destroyed these categories of thought. You can get book after book about the dumbing down of America

and it's all true. I'm not dumping on some of the teachers, some of them are wonderful. I am dumping on the system. Why is it that when the government gets its hand in anything else we jump all over them but when it comes to education we keep believing the lie that it's really okay, the government's doing a good job, education is neutral and all the rest of it. Look, if you think our children are getting an education please go back and look at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade education of the 1920's, you'll think you're reading senior level material. You didn't need to go to college back then, college today is to make up for what you should have learned in high school but weren't taught. Go back and read letters of the soldiers in the Civil War, letters they wrote to their wives and children, you'll think they were Harvard graduates. But they were farmers. And thus it's the government de-education system. It has destroyed thought, it has destroyed Christian categories of thought. And now people don't think in terms of them. Our society is a carbon copy of Lystra.

These people begin, verse 11, to talk to one another in their native language. Notice, Paul with the gift of tongues which is a special supernatural gift, even here, cannot use it for translating other languages because his gift of languages and interpretation of languages is reserved for a particular announcement to Jewish people, but there are no Jewish people, and so that gift isn't accessible for use at this time. So Paul and Barnabas stood by, totally ignorant of vv 11, 12 and 13. They didn't figure out what was going on until verse 14. Apparently there's a gap of time in there between vv 10-14. We don't know how long, it could have been five minutes, it could have been 5 hours. Some commentators think they went home and it wasn't until hours later they show up at the door trying to sacrifice to these guys that they figure it all out. But we don't know, all we know is some time passed and when they found out they got sick.

So let's see in vv 11-13 what they got out of all this, how they interpret Paul's message inside their pagan framework v 11, **When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.** Hermes by the way, is the root for the word hermeneutics, the rules for interpreting literature. There are rules to interpreting things, you can't just say it means whatever you want it to mean, the rules are objective and outside of your personal

opinion, which means the Bible and all other literature can be understood as having a single meaning, it's not anything goes.

Now, these people, let's think from their side, see what they've done. The first thing they've done is credit the whole thing to Paul, look what **Paul has done**. The second thing they do is interpret Barnabas and Paul as **Zeus and Hermes**, divine visitors. And in fact we can understand why when we realize an ancient piece of literature by the Roman poet, Ovid. Ovid wrote about a divine visitation of Zeus and Hermes, who had come to this same area years before. And they tried to get hospitality in a thousand homes and nobody would give them the time of day, till finally one poor, old couple offered them dinner. And they ate their meal and when the bowl of food was empty it just filled right back up and the old couple realized these were divine visitors. And after dinner Zeus and Hermes took the old couple up on a hill and showed them the whole countryside full of all the people who didn't give them the time of day and then they proceeded to fill it with water. But they turned to their tiny house and transformed it into a large marble temple with a gilded roof. And so with this poetry in their background mythology, do you blame them at all? The don't want their city inundated with water, so they start throwing them a big party.

Another thing here to observe is that just in front of the city gate they had a Temple of Zeus. V13 shows you the **priest** of that Temple. And sure enough Sir William Ramsay has discovered epigraphic evidence of a Temple of Zeus in that city. And so you can see from their framework how they could misunderstand what Paul said and did. Well, the people begin to cluster around this Temple outside the gate and they got oxen, and they start covering them with garlands, just as we see in the pictures of the ancient world. And Paul and Barnabas don't know what's going on until they finally get someone who knows Greek and Lycaonian and they translate over what's going on and you can see from v 14 Paul and Barnabas didn't like it one bit. They were appalled at this, **they tore their robes**, which means they took their shirt right up at the collar and tore it about a hand length down, and they **rushed out in the crowd**. This is the godly response, every human being or angel that worships God never permits themselves to be worshipped, while pagans in the ancient world, especially the Caesars, required people to worship them. Paul and Barnabas do everything they can to stop it.

And Paul begins in v 15, he's inspected what's happening, he realizes the problem, "Hey, these people didn't get what I was saying." And so notice how he attacks. Does he start in with Jesus? NO, he probably already talked about Him; they completely fouled Him up. So he does what only a handful of Christian groups do today. Now we've said time and time again, you don't start with Jesus. I don't know how many more times we'll have to go over it till it sinks in, but here it is in the Bible again. He goes back to the doctrine of God. How could you possibly understand who Jesus is without starting with the doctrine of God? Jesus is God and God is sovereign, God is righteous, God is just, God is loving and so forth, our acronym, SRJLOOOIE. So it seems so simple to me that to understand the God-man you have to first understand God. But no, we just bypass that today and tell Jesus stories. Don't do that, do what Paul did. And we should add he should have done this to begin with but apparently he didn't, so Paul's on a learning curve, he's going to make the same mistake in chapter 17 and by the time he writes the Book of Romans he'll have it knocked out.

But here in v 15 he's at least noticed, "Hey, these people don't even have the basics of who God is," and he starts going back to the Creation event because that's where the nature of God is defined. And so verse 15 begins with a challenge, "**Men, why are you doing these things?** We call that challenging your opponent. Can you justify why you're doing the things you're doing? That's a good question to ask someone. At least maybe it will make them think for once in their life. Why do you do what you do? Do you have any basis for doing that other than just your opinion? And of course they haven't. The only authority in paganism is your opinion. It's just your opinion vs my opinion and all opinions are equal because there are no absolutes. So Paul challenges that one by speaking in terms of absolutes, **We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.** Now that's a message that carries authority. And the authority isn't you and the authority isn't me. God the Creator is the authority. And by referring to God as the "living God" what is Paul saying by implication about Zeus and Hermes? Their dead. They're just figments of your imagination. You think that might be offensive to these people? All your beliefs are just in your head? Do you think Paul cares? He just trashed their whole system. And by doing this we

might add, you're doing these people a favor. Paul did not believe all religions were equal. He believed in absolute truth revealed in the word of God.

So isn't this interesting? What has Paul done? He's backed up. Now he's started his presentation with the God of Creation. Forget Jesus for now, these people are screwed up way back here with G-o-d. In fact, in this presentation he never gets to Jesus. That's okay; we're not in a race to get to Jesus. You may be but the Holy Spirit took 4,000 years to get to Jesus so just relax. Paul, as relaxed as he can be having gotten everyone confused, goes back to creation. Why? Because creation defines who and what God is. These two are so closely linked that if you tell me your view of origins I can tell you your view of God. They are that closely linked. Now many Christians today don't want to deal with origins because it's such a controversial topic. And so we bypass that but in doing so you will never get the biblical Jesus because the biblical Jesus is the creator Jesus, that's John 1 and Col 1. You can't bypass. If you bypass the creation-evolution controversy you will never be able to present the correct doctrine of God or the correct doctrine of Jesus. It's just impossible. Say for example you're discussing the issue of origins with someone and they say, "I'm a theistic evolutionist, I believe God used evolution. Yeah, that's how God did it." Have they not also just told you their view of God? Have they not just told you that God is a God of process and not miracle, in other words God is not sovereign, He's subject to work in the confines of natural law, and now what you've done is brought God down into the creation and subjected him to the creation. So you've violated the Creator-creature distinction. What else have you said about God? Well, you've said that death proceeds the fall by millions and billions of years and so death could not be the result of Adam's sin because it preceded Adam's sin. And therefore, by logical deduction, if sin did not enter by Adam then it cannot be removed by Jesus Christ. The logic flows, you can't stop it.

And so Paul says in v 15, "Hey, the God I'm talking about is the Creator of nature, he's not subject to nature, He's above nature, he's not like the Greek gods and goddesses who are connected with nature forces. He's above the forces." And so the very first thing He does is cut God off from nature. God made those things, He is not those things, a quote from Exod 20:11.

Verse 16, where does he go next? **"In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;** You look at verse 16

quick and you think that that must refer to God as just kind of letting people go in the sense that He doesn't mind their rebellion. No; that's not what verse 16 is talking about. Verse 16 is talking about the fact that God let sin get into the system and that's the second piece of our divine viewpoint framework, the Fall. Paul has to straighten these people out on Creation, he has to straighten them out on the issue of how evil gets into the system so they don't have an evil God. And once sin was in the system God let men walk in their sin. Implication, He's not doing that anymore.

Verse 17, you say, well then if God let us walk in this sin and didn't do anything about it then we're not responsible to Him. Uh, uh, **He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.**" God may have cut off special revelation from you guys but he didn't cut off general revelation. That continued. What event in Scripture did God promise that that was going to continue? The Noahic Covenant. Notice, I gave you rains from heaven. What do rains generate in the sky? Other than clouds, what optical phenomena? Rainbow. What's the sign of the Noahic Covenant? The rainbow. What does that mean? That God's never going to permit a global inundation of planet earth. There's a stability to nature and yes, there's fluctuation and oscillation but it's limited to a zone. There are boundaries and those boundaries are controlled by God who sits on his rainbow-encircled throne. The rainbow may be a fascinating optical phenomena, but it's more than that. It is the finite analog of the rainbow around His throne. And so he gave us that phenomena so every time a member of the human race sees that it's a reminder, "Hey God is there and He controls the system, He controls the universe, He protects planet earth, He does this for you, He does this for me and He does this for every living creature." It's what theologians call common grace. It's common because it's for all living creatures. All of us are on the receiving end from God. We receive rains, fruitful seasons, satisfied hearts, that is souls, he fills your tummy with food and your spirit with gladness. You didn't just think that happened did you? That's common grace. God gives that. Why does God give that? To give men time to repent. God is giving people time to reflect on dinner, to say, "Boy, that was really good." How did that happen? Of course, no one ever thinks that, but that's what it's there for. For men to think. To reflect on joy, "I see my baby being born, joy, joy overwhelming. Where does

that come from?” Of course, we shut all that down, don’t want to face it. It just is, no explanation and we go on storing up wrath for the last judgment.

And so verse 18 closes, **Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.** They did restrain them but it was with great difficulty because these people had enveloped the gospel into their pagan framework and reinterpreted it. This presentation, quite frankly, was a disaster. And why it was a disaster was because Paul did what just about every so-called evangelist does today, and that is, he assumed a knowledge his audience did not have. And anytime you do that you will be reinterpreted. I don’t care if it’s a miracle, people can see that and generate instantaneously another explanation. It’s not that they didn’t all share the same facts, and this is what you have to understand. People can all have the same facts but when it comes to the interpretation of the facts that’s where the presuppositions come in. And if you have one set you interpret one way, if you have another set you interpret another way. And so these two positions are miles away. Either God is the Creator of nature or He’s a part of nature. Evil either has a beginning or is eternal. And God either controls the universe or it’s the chaos of the god and goddess nature forces. There is no continuity between these positions. There is no neutrality. There is just one side or the other. And until you get these basic issues settled you can’t get to Jesus. Paul never got there the second time around. That’s okay, most people are so screwed up up here that you have to go back, all the way back to Creation and who God is, who we are, the Fall, what sin is, the Noahic Covenant, where stability in nature comes from. Once you get that clarified then you can give the gospel and then you can see the division, then we’re back at Iconium. But learn from this. This stuff is in the Bible so we can learn from these failures. Let’s not repeat the failures.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2009