

# From an Unknown God to the True God

## Անծանօթ Աստուած եւ Ճշմարիտ Աստուած

### Acts 17:22-35; 18:1-3, 18-19, 24-26

(Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 26; Rom 16:3-5; 1Cor 16:19; 2Tim 4:19 ).

Last Sunday we were in Athens. The capital city of philosophy, new religions, ideologies... As I read more about them, I see their thinking has influenced us even today.

Philosophers like **Heraclitus** and **Parmenides** were seeking the ultimate truth. They could not agree about the result. The people who came after them abandoned the search for the ultimate truth, saying that truth is something beyond man's ability to penetrate. So Greek philosophy produced **cynicism** and **skepticism**. This is the time when **Socrates** appeared on the scene.

**Plato**, on the other hand, revived the quest for the ultimate truth. His famous student **Aristotle** disagreed with him. Thus, if Plato and Aristotle could not agree about it, obviously the ultimate truth could not be discovered. This was the end of search for the ultimate truth.

So here we are. This was the period of **skepticism**.

Just think about our society now. Search for the ultimate truth is almost gone.

Everything is relative, morality is shaky when there is no ultimate truth. Everything is permissible. If it feels good, do it.

Let me review one more time the sermon that Paul gave in the court of Areopagus in Athens:

Please notice how Paul approaches this audience. He enters their world and creates a bridge to gain their attention.

He observes that there is one altar for the UNKNOWN GOD. And he thinks he could use that to introduce the true God. **“TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. (17:23b).**

So he starts from their logic and their “religion.”

Here is the outline of this sermon:

#### 1. God is Creator of the Universe (v. 24)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>24</sup> **“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands**

Epicureans don't believe in a personal God who is the Creator, and Stoics believe the divine is in all of us.

Paul goes further, that God created everything.

He draws the picture of the true God, who is **transcendent and all powerful**, creator...but God is not detached from his creation...God is personal (**"he is not far from any one of us" vs 27**). It is crazy to think that God is in a building.

## 2. God is the Sustainer of Life (v. 25)

**<sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.**

God did not just create the universe; he is involved by sustaining it. He does not need us, we need Him.

## 3. God is the Sovereign Ruler of all Nations (vv. 26-27a)

**<sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him**

This God, Creator, is also the God of all nations.

That was odd for the Greeks. They considered themselves above all other nations. All humanity, all nations came from **the same man**, therefore no nation has superiority.

Paul is explaining why God created humans, so that they seek Him and find Him and have fellowship with Him.

## 4. God is the Father of all Human Beings (vv. 27b-29)

**and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'**

**<sup>29</sup> "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.**

Paul stresses that the God the Creator, the transcendent God is also not far from us. He is near to us because we are His children created in His image. So, we should not decrease the image of God and make him of gold, silver, and stone... Don't limit God...

Then Paul quotes from their poet Epimenides and Artus, and gives it a new meaning.

If we are all created by God's offspring, that means he created us, we are his workmanship, we should not create gods...

### 5. Conclusion: God is our Judge (vv. 30-31)

**"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." (30)** I think Paul is saying, "God gave us a chance when we were ignorant. Now that we know, He calls us for repentance." Without using the name of Jesus, he preaches about the Judgement Day by a "man" who was raised from the dead.

### Paul moves to the next city, Corinth:

From Athens to Corinth, a two-day journey by land.

Corinth was an important harbor city and it was **wealthy**. Corinth's **wealth** was due to its strategic location on the Isthmus of Corinth, the land bridge connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese Peninsula to the south. It commanded both the north-south trade routes by land and the east-west trade routes by sea. There was a lot of traffic in this city. There were a lot of sailors, merchants, and businesspeople passing by or working there.

-This city too had its high point (hill) like Athens.

"Though Corinth was known for their wealth and arrogance, their **trademark** was their **immorality**. Behind the city, nearly 2,000 feet above sea level, rose the rocky eminence called the **Acrocorinth**. On its flat summit stood the temple of **Aphrodite or Venus**, the goddess of love. A thousand female slaves served her and roamed the city's streets by night as prostitutes. The sexual promiscuity of Corinth was proverbial, so that *korinthiazomai* meant to practice immorality, and *korinthiastēs* was a synonym for a harlot. Corinth was the Vanity Fair of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup>

Please let us go to chapter 18

**After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. <sup>4</sup> Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:1-4 NIV11)**

We are introduced to a married couple, **Aquila and Priscilla**.

They are a Jewish couple from Rome, (at least Aquila, I assume his wife is a Jew);

**Caesar Claudius**, emperor of that time expelled the Jews from Rome (52 AD). Paul stayed in Corinth for 1 ½ years. He had issues with Synagogue Jews, but God gave him chance to remain in that city. Even the head of the synagogue came to know Christ.

### **1. Paul found a common ground with Aquila and Priscilla (tentmakers)**

Paul and Aquila and Priscilla are tent makers. Paul stayed with this couple, also Paul worked with this couple.

It seems this couple could work together. Not everyone will work together!!!!

I am not sure if this couple was already Christian before coming to Corinth. Luke does not say that. But please imagine that Paul is working with this couple day and night and staying in their home for 1 ½ years. I am certain Paul talked about His faith in Jesus Christ. Paul saw the potential to disciple this couple.

By the way, the Bible doesn't mention a lot about them. (Acts 18:2-3, 18-19, 26; Rom 16:3-5; 1Cor 16:19; 2Tim 4:19).

One thing I know is that they became committed Christians.

### **2. This couple served and travelled with Paul, especially to Ephesus.**

**Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. ....<sup>19</sup> They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.** (Acts 18:18-19 NIV11)

It looks like Ephesus became their home. Maybe when Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, this couple read the letter in their home, why not?

I see that Paul prepares disciples: people to take the leadership in the church. In this case lay people, tent makers.

We read in the letter to the Romans:

**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup>They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. <sup>5</sup>Greet also the church that meets at their house.** (Rom 16:3-5 NIV11)

Paul is calling them **co-workers**, even they **risked their lives** for Paul. I don't know what they did, but Paul was commending them.

### **3. Priscilla and Aquila became themselves "people builders."**

Let me go to the end Acts 18.

<sup>24</sup> **Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the**

**Scriptures.** <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. (Acts 18:24-26 NIV11)

Here we have a new name **Apollos**. He was a Godly man. He knew the OT. He was raised in Alexandria, a city of intellectuals. He was an evangelist. He was baptized by John the Baptist. He knew about Jesus and was teaching about Jesus with "great fervor" and Luke says: "his teaching was accurate", but not complete. -Let me ask you, what happens when we come to Jesus and be baptized. Baptism is sign of surrendering the old life (immersed in water) and coming out new person. God granted us new LIFE.

Apollos is on fire to teach about Jesus. But he needs the Holy Spirit. He needs to surrender to Jesus.

**<sup>26</sup> Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. 26**

Don't you love how these two believers disciple this man?

Instead of gossiping, bad mouthing, "he is false teacher", they invite him into their home.

What a nice place to talk, **home, table, food, fellowship**. They explain to him the **way of God more adequately**.

-It makes me think. We can be in the same situation. You can know about Jesus, but that does not mean you did surrender your life to Jesus.

I assume that **Aquila and Priscilla** explained, thought, Apollos, and it was not in vain. Apollos became a Christian.

-Do you know that Apollos became a teacher like Paul and like Peter:

**Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." (1 Cor 1:11,12)**

### **Application:**

How do we build people?

What can I learn from this couple?

### **1. If you see an issue, you don't cross out their name.**

You invite them, "you move into their lives." Give a chance, and teach...explain...invite...

-The grace of Jesus teaches that... grace gives a chance... it gave me a chance and you...why not to others...

Don't cross over people... God did not do that...we need to build people.

Affirmation of the body is an important part of discipleship...

### **2. Priscilla and Aquila did not embarrass Apollos publicly, they took him to their home.**

-I see on social media people trash each other, even Christians.

How helpful is that to the message of Jesus? We should be bold to not compromise wrong teaching, but we should be wise how we face issues.

-We are lacking spiritual maturity; we cannot listen to someone else's correction. -

-We are super sensitive.

-We need humility to see accept guidance, teaching; we need spiritual maturity.

I need **God's grace** in me to be mature. **His grace humbles** me and reminds me who I am. "I did not deserve that, But Jesus gave me a new chance"....

Ask, What Christ did to me?

### **3. Do you have someone like Paul (Priscilla and Aquila) in your life who disciplined you?**

**Apollos was sent to the mission field**

**When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.**

**When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.<sup>28</sup> For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 18:27-28 NIV11)**

**Thus:**

-Do you have someone like Paul in your life who disciplined you?

I had one, Sevan had one, without them we would not be standing here.

-Do you have someone like Priscilla and Aquila who helped Apollos to be corrected?

1. The outline of Paul's sermon taken from Brian Morgan, *Paul Among the Philosophers* PBCC Sermon, 05/20/2018

2. John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 293-96.