

Come to Understanding

**They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24**

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One God

When Paul came to Athens, his spirit was stirred within himself because the whole city was completely devoted to the worship of idols:

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. -Acts 17

In Paul's view, the city of Athens was actually dedicated to the worship of devils (demons), as he had explained to the people of Corinth:

19 What say I then? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything?

20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils. -1 Corinthians 10

Paul described himself as a devout Israelite, whose background was that of a Pharisee, who were strict observers of the law of Moses. His eyes, however, had been opened to see that Yahshua (Jesus) was the promised Messiah, in whom He truly believed:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the congregation; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for the Messiah. -Philippians 3

Blameless in his views on the "righteousness of the law," Paul would have taken very seriously the commandments that Yahweh gave to Moses concerning images, such as those that were being worshipped as idols in Athens:

15 Take you therefore good heed unto yourselves; for you saw no manner of likeness on the day *that* Yahweh spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:

16 Lest you corrupt *yourselves*, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

17 The likeness of any beast that *is* on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flies in the air,

18 The likeness of anything that creeps on the ground,

the likeness of any fish that *is* in the waters beneath the earth:

19 And lest you lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, *even* all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them, which Yahweh your God has divided to all nations under the whole heaven. -Deuteronomy 4

However, even the devout Jews in Athens had apparently rejected the commandments that Yahweh had given to Moses concerning the worship of idols. Even as Paul disputed with them in the synagogues, he also tried to preach the truth to whomever would listen, even with those he met daily in the public market:

17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. -Acts 17

Paul was known for stirring up crowds by teaching the truth concerning the worship of idols. When he went to Ephesus, he created great controversies as he taught the error of their worship of the images of the Greek goddess Artemis, who was known to the Romans as Diana. Those who profited from making the idols led the charges against Paul:

23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

24 For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana *Artemis*, brought no small gain to the craftsmen;

25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth.

26 Moreover you see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are no gods, which are made with hands:

27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nothing; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana *Artemis* should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.

28 And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great *is* Diana *Artemis* of the Ephesians. -Acts 19

**So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8**

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Likewise, as Paul preached the gospel of Yahshua, the Greek philosophers, known as Epicureans and Stoicks, rose up and accused him of promoting “strange gods” and of teaching about the resurrection:

18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babler say? and others said, He seems to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached to them Yahshua, and the resurrection. -Acts 17

The Epicureans were followers of a Greek philosopher named Epicurus (341-270 B. C.). Sometimes described as “pagan Sadducees,” their focus was only on the present life. They believed that the chief purpose in life was to obtain pleasure:

The soul they believed to be generated with the body, and to perish with it—placing their chief good in the pleasures of the present life, and their highest wisdom in such a degree of self-government as should be conducive to the largest amount of present gratification. (see Robert Vaughn, *The Causes of the Corruption of Christianity*, London: Jackson and Walford, 1852, p. 128)

The Stoicks (Stoics), on the other hand, regarded virtue as the only good, and the only thing worth striving for in life. (see R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910, p. 9) Even though the Epicureans and the Stoicks had differing views concerning the object of life, they were in agreement in wanting to know more about this “new doctrine” that Paul was teaching. They took him to the Athenian council, known as Areopagus and also translated as “Mars Hill.” There they asked him to further explain in front of the “Athenians and strangers” the “strange things” he was teaching:

19 And they took him, and brought him to Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof you speak, is?

20 For you bring certain strange things to our ears: we would *like to* know therefore what these things mean.

21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) -Acts 17

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Paul obliged them. Observing that they tried to please the idols through their sacrifices and rituals, Paul told them that he perceived they were “too superstitious” (the Greek literally means “too fearful of demons”). Using the inscription on an altar dedicated “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD,” whom they ignorantly worshipped, Paul declared to them that this was the one true God, the One they didn’t even know:

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, You men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and saw your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I to you. -Acts 17

The true God, Paul explained, is the creator of all things. He doesn’t live in temples or in images made with hands. Instead, He is near us all the time, if we would only seek Him. We are his offspring, his children. Demonstrating his knowledge of Greek culture to the learned philosophers he was addressing, Paul quoted Epimenides (circa 600 B.C.), saying “in him we live, and move, and have our being:”

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he gives to all life, and breath, and all things;

26 And has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if then they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. -Acts 17

God, Paul continued, will no longer wink at man’s ignorance, thinking that they can worship Him through images made with hands. Instead, they must repent from such things, because God has appointed a time for judgment in which man will be held accountable for such practices:

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent:

31 Because he has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he has ordained; *whereof* he has given assurance to all *men*, in that he has raised him from the dead. -Acts 17

There is one God, who is Yahweh. If we love Him with all our heart, soul, and might, as we are commanded to do, then there is no room in our hearts to love any images:

4 Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God *is* one Yahweh:

5 And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. -Deuteronomy 6