

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – Mission to the Unreached: Part 1 – 2-8 Dec 2023

Christ would have us know that, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). “For with Thee is the Fountain of Life” (Psalm 36:9). “All things come of Thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14). “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). Not only has God, through Christ, created all things, but their continued existence depends upon Him alone. We have redemption through the blood of Christ, “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16-17). The message to the unreached is this: Christ, the Son of God, is life of everything.

Sunday: A Hebrew in Athens – In Acts 17:1-16, how did Paul wind up in Athens, and how did he respond to what he found there? When Paul came to Athens, his spirit was stirred, agitated powerfully, because he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Athens was then the metropolis of the world, the seat of all learning and art. It no doubt had more in it to attract the eye than all the rest of the world. Paul was educated and refined; he doubtless had an eye for the beautiful, both in nature and art. But his was the true culture and refinement – the culture that comes from an acquaintance with God. The vanities of Athens had no attraction for him. He could think only of the one thing – that all these were leading from God. How many Christians are there at the present time who, like Paul, are agitated over the wickedness that abounds, rather than attracted by and lost in admiration for the splendour that is often only a covering for vice? In this age of the world especially the Christian has something far greater to attract the attention than mere sight-seeing. We should not fail to notice the adroitness and skill with which Paul introduced his subject.

Monday: Paul in Areopagus – What lessons do we learn from the approach that Paul first adopted in Areopagus? EGW tells us: “Many suppose that in order to reach the higher classes, a manner of life and method of work must be adopted that will be suited to their fastidious tastes. An appearance of wealth, costly edifices, expensive dress, equipage, and surroundings, conformity to worldly customs, the artificial polish of fashionable society, classical culture, the graces of oratory, are thought to be essential. This is an error. The way of worldly policy is not God's way of reaching the higher classes. That which will reach them effectually is a consistent, unselfish presentation of the gospel of Christ” {MH 213.5}. “The experience of the apostle Paul in meeting the philosophers of Athens has a lesson for us. In presenting the gospel before the court of the Areopagus, Paul met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. The wisest of his hearers were astonished and silenced. His words could not be controverted. But the effort bore little fruit. Few were led to accept the gospel. Henceforth Paul adopted a different manner of labor. He avoided elaborate arguments and discussion of theories, and in simplicity pointed men and women to Christ as the Saviour of sinners. Writing to the Corinthians of his work among them, he said:” {MH 214.1}. “I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.... My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:1-5” {MH 214.2}. To the unreached wisest men, let us preach “Christ, and Him crucified.”

Tuesday: Paul and the Unknown God – How did Paul introduce the true God to the philosophers in Athens? The philosophers had said, “He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods” (Acts 17:18). Now the Athenians were very jealous of the worship of their gods. It is thought that they greatly surpassed all others in their zeal for religion. It was dangerous for anyone to speak against their idol worship. About 400 years before, Socrates, one of their own philosophers, the wisest and most highly esteemed of any among them, had been put to death because they thought he was unsettling the minds of the young, and teaching disrespect for the gods. Paul took them on their own ground. He said, “I perceive

that ye are somewhat superstitious” (verse 22). He had seen an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown God;” so he said, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” They could find no fault with him for teaching them more perfectly concerning a god whom they professed to worship. Do you profess to worship God, yet you know Him not?

Wednesday: Introducing a New God – How would the way Paul introduced the true God to the Athenians apply to Christians today in some parts of the world who seem to spend much money on physical church structures than on reaching hearts of worshippers in their midst? If such Christians would believe and remember that the Almighty “dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24), but that the human heart is His temple and dwelling-place, there would be less money spent in useless ornamentation of church buildings, and more in the work of making human hearts a fit dwelling-place for the Spirit of Christ. It is the inward adorning that God looks upon with approval. When Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, preached the Gospel before the Jewish Sanhedrim, it was these words that stirred the grave assembly to fury, and caused them to gnash on him with their teeth: “Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?” Acts 7:46-49). This is what Paul said to the Athenians (Acts 17:24); and Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, said: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have builded?” (1 Kings 8:27). “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15).

Thursday: Crossing a Line – In Acts 17:24-34, how did Paul cross the line in his talk to the people at Mars Hill, and how are most Adventists like the philosophers at Mars Hill in their understanding of God? Let us explore this in the context of our three angels’ message in Revelation 14:6-7. You are familiar with the text. The issue here is worship. Paul preaching at Mars Hill, called his hearers to the worship of the true God, and he says: “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). But the people at Mars Hill, with their philosophical understanding of who God was, they could not follow the preaching of Paul. Many today, who claim to preach the message of Revelation 14:6-7 are no different. To them, the words of Jesus apply very well: “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matthew 11:25). Without mysticism, the word of God is not difficult, for even babes can understand the God that Revelation 14:6-7 calls us to worship: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Jesus confirmed the words spoken by Moses when He had a conversation with the Scribe in Mark 12:28-34. Notice that Jesus quote Moses, “Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.” In Revelation 14 we are told to “give honour” to God. This also is what Jesus Himself did, He gave honour to God: “Jesus answered, If I honour Myself, My honour is nothing: it is My Father that honoureth Me; of whom ye say, that He is your God” (John 8:54). But those who apply philosophy to the word of God, like the Greeks at Mars Hill, tend to complicate the words by Moses about one God. They point to the words in Genesis and say the words used for “God” there was “Elohim” and that means plural, so they build a theory of plurality of God. There is no plurality in the word “Elohim,” but majesty. We see this applied to Moses in Exodus 7:1: “the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh.” Check it out, but the word applied to Moses is Elohim. “I have made thee a Elohim to Pharaoh,” said the LORD to Moses. Moses as Elohim was not multiple of Moses. Elohim means majesty. Elohim is greatness. This is given in Exodus 11:3: “Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, and in the sight of the people.” So, greatness is what Elohim meant. God is Majesty, God is Great, that is, Elohim. Notice, to know the true God that Revelation 14:6-7 calls us to worship, Jesus says it is life eternal. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Let us accept the truth and reject modern Mars Hill philosophy.