

## Enthroned and then Stoned

### Acts 14:8-20

Sermon by Phillip G. Kayser 7-22-2007

One of the things that we noticed last week was that Paul and Barnabas were not quitters. No matter what the difficulty, they pursued God's call. And so far we have seen that they have had a couple of pretty rough rides. At the end of chapter 13 they get thrown out on their ear. In chapter 14:6 they had to flee for their lives from Iconium. But they got back in the saddle even when they got bucked off.

But what I want to point out today is that bucking is not the only trick that mean horses can play. I have ridden horses that would try to knock your leg against a tree or a wall or barbed wire or would run under a low hanging branch to knock you off (and you've got to kind of hang on to the side). My own horse loved to jump sideways without warning. But my parents had a really nice mule that never did any of those things. Once you got a saddle on the mule, you were just fine. But it would seem to find humor in taking in a deep breath and expanding its ribcage before you put the saddle on, so that when you tightened the girth, it would seem tight, but when it later relaxed its ribcage, the saddle would slide sideways, and so would you. The point is that Satan doesn't use the same tricks all the time. In fact, some time it might be fun to go through the whole book of Acts in showing the wide range of tactics that Satan uses to oppose the Gospel and the Gospel messengers.

In this section we see Satan trying something quite different than he has tried before. If he can't get these men to quit through persecution, he will try to undermine their power by giving them celebrity status. If he can appeal to their pride, he knows that God Himself will resist them. And of course, Satan was not successful, so eventually he goes from enthroning them to stoning them.

#### I. Miracle - An opening for ministry (vv. 8-10)

##### A. *Our God is a God of miracles (vv. 8-10) and there is no reason to restrict miracles to the apostles (see v. 20 – "disciples")*

But let's set the context here by looking at the miracle. Verse 8 says, **And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.** Luke wants to

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make sure that we don't miss the point that this is a remarkable miracle. Three things make this man's condition seem hopeless: 1) he was crippled, 2) this condition had existed from the womb and 3) he had never walked. You can't explain this away as a psychosomatic condition or as a placebo effect. This was truly a miracle.

Verse 9 says, **This man heard Paul speaking.** Notice that Paul had not been trying to heal without preaching. This was the problem with the liberal social gospel. They wanted to do good things, but to do it without the Word. Verses 6-7 indicate that he had been preaching all throughout the area. So the faith that the man has arises out of hearing the Word.

And so, verse 9 continues: **Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed...** So the miracle of healing is preceded by a miracle of revelational discernment. Paul didn't do miracles at whim, but according to divine direction.

Verse 10: **said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.** It is clear that a miracle occurred. We believe in miracles. There are some Reformed people who believe that all miracles have ceased. I am not one of those. I concur with those Puritans and Reformers who believed that God can sovereignly perform miracles in any age at His sovereign pleasure. I have demonstrated this to be true in previous sermons, but we do have a hint of it in verse 18. Some people believe that only apostles perform miracles. But it appears that Paul is raised up as a result of the *disciples* gathering around him for prayer in verse 20. These aren't super-Christians. They are brand new believers. And as a result of their gathering around him in prayer, Paul rises up.

***B. But there are some cautions which should be understood***

**1. .It isn't miracles that save people (vv. 3,7,9,11 with Luke 16:30-31)**

But having said all of that, I want to spend some time dealing with some cautions that need to be stated. Each of the points that I have included in your outline under Roman numeral I, point B address an imbalance in the modern church with respect to miracles. The first thing that I want you to notice is that it isn't miracles that save people.

**a) This man may have already been saved ("had faith") from Paul's preaching (vv. 7,9)**

First of all, this man may very well have been saved already by hearing from Paul's preaching. Notice in verse 7 that Paul has been

preaching in the area. Notice that verse 9 starts by saying, **This man heard Paul speaking.** The faith mentioned in verse 9 was present before there was a healing. It was not the miracle that produced faith, but the Gospel.

**b) Signs and wonders are not a substitute for the Word of God, but a confirmation of the Word (see. v. 3)**

A second reason why I think this passage hints that the miracle didn't save people is in verse 3 where Luke says that the signs and wonders were God's bearing witness to the *word* of grace. It was the Word that God wanted them to pay attention to. So the miracles were an aid in preaching the Gospel, but were not a substitute for the Gospel.

**c) Notice that the people excited by the miracle were definitely not saved.**

Thirdly, the people who get all excited by the miracle were definitely not saved. They end up stoning Paul. While we don't want to discount the importance of miracles, neither do we want to exaggerate their ability to turn hard hearts into soft hearts. People rarely get offended with a miracle in their lives; it is God's Word that offends them.

Listen to the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham in Christ's story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is burning in hell and he says to Abraham, **I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment."** Abraham said to him, **"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."** And he said, **"No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent."** But he said to him, **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.** That would be a great miracle indeed – to rise from the dead. But that wouldn't convince a soul, if that soul would not already be convinced by the Bible. My point is that miracles are wonderful, but they are no substitute for the Word or the Gospel. Miracles have a limited role.

**2. Signs and wonders do not guarantee that people will listen to the Gospel (v. 3 with "But" of v. 4; also v. 11)**

This conclusion is reinforced with the contrast between verse 3 and verse 4. Verse 3 ends with signs and wonders, while verse 4 begins with a "But." **But the multitude of the city was divided...** Miracles don't even

guarantee that people will listen to the Gospel. Certainly they didn't listen to what Paul and Barnabas were saying very well in the next verses.

**3. Signs and wonders can sometimes lead to the wrong conclusion (vv. 11-13)**

A third caution hinted at is given in verses 11-13. The people don't deny that a miracle had occurred. Instead, they come to a wrong conclusion. And people do that all the time today. They see a miracle, and they assume all kinds of crazy things – sometimes because of the bad theology of the person who prayed for the miracle, but sometimes simply because we have a tendency toward deception. That's why we've always got to judge everything by the Word of God.

**4. Signs and wonders are not the only evidence of God's power (v. 15)**

A fourth caution is that signs and wonders are not the only evidence of God's power in our lives. When we overemphasize miracles we can begin to neglect the awesome power of God at work in the ordinary. Sure, I like the extraordinary miracles that God has brought into my life. But I also love the ordinary providences that verse 15 talks about. It takes incredible power to hold heaven, earth, sea and all things in them together. It takes incredible power to make an eye work. We ought to stand in awe of both miracles and God's creative work in the eyeball and the rain and the sunshine. Don't put down the splendor of God in the ordinary.

**5. Signs and wonders are not intended to keep us healthy, wealthy and out of trouble (v. 19,22). Instead, they are intended to glorify God (v. 15).**

A fifth caution is that signs and wonders were not intended by God to be the ordinary means of keeping God's people healthy, solvent and out of trouble. Some people will not go to doctors because they expect miracles to be ordinary. The whole point of calling it a wonder is that it isn't ordinary. You can't expect a wonder every day. God expects us to follow the ordinary laws of harvest if we want to increase our wealth, stay fit and keep out of trouble. He's not going to perpetually do a miracle to remove your weight. That would remove our responsibility. To make miracles an everyday occurrence is to diminish both the wonder of a miracle and the importance of the ordinary.

## 6. Signs and wonders are not intended by God to bypass the need for patience (v. 22).

The last caution that I want to give with respect to miracles is that they were not intended by God to bypass the need for patience. You see the need for the apostles to have patience all through this book. But just notice for now, verse 22. ...**strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.** Notice the “must.” This is not the health and wealth Gospel. If we were to apply that logic to life, we would come up with strange conclusions. For example, we might plant a watermelon seed and pray for a miracle – instant watermelon. Of course nobody does that. But why do we do exactly the same thing when it comes to politics? We pray for changes but put no patient effort into trying to make a difference within our sphere of influence? Keep in mind that I believe in miracles, but miracles were never intended to make us lazy or take away the need for patience in the midst of tribulation.

## II. Misunderstanding – interpreting the miracle (and speech) of Paul within a pagan worldview (vv. 11-13)

### A. A worldview<sup>1</sup>

But let’s go on to look at the results of this miracle. Verses 11-13: **Acts 14:11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lyconian *language*, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!”**

**Acts 14:12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.**

**Acts 14:13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.**

The miracle was immediately interpreted within the worldview of those pagans. They knew exactly how to interpret this. Their interpretation of this event and their reactions may seem bizarre. But then, our religious practices may have seemed just as strange to them if we were to bring them

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<sup>1</sup> Here are some helpful definitions of a worldview :”a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world” (James Sire). “a network of presuppositions about reality, knowledge, and behavior, which is not verified by the procedures of natural science but in terms of which every aspect of man’s knowledge and experience is interpreted and interrelated.” (Bahnsen, “A Biblical Introduction to Apologetics, p.

back in history. Why? Because our worldview dictates how we view life. Our worldview is what makes us think of things as normal or abnormal. If you don't feel normal doing Biblical things it is because you don't have a consistently Biblical worldview. Your sense of normal is being affected by a mixture of pagan and Christian assumptions (or what we call presuppositions).

And I want to spend a bit of time trying to define a worldview, and then we will get back into the text. A worldview is the network of assumptions (what we call presuppositions) which you consciously or unconsciously hold to and through which you interpret all of reality.<sup>2</sup> If you think of your worldview as a spiderweb, you will find that at the very center of your web is your ultimate authority. For a Christian, it should be the Bible, but frequently it is not, because we have mixed worldviews. Sometimes at the center of our web of assumptions is peer pressure as our highest authority. When push comes to shove, we will do what our peers expect us to do. We don't always know why, but it is because we have allowed peer opinion to take root as the central authority. Sometimes it is current scientific opinion. But everyone has one or more authorities at the center of their lives that drive their behaviors. And it can be a mixed authority. For these Greeks, it was their religious system. When they saw a miracle, it was perfectly natural for them to assume that their own gods have done the miracle.

For our fun night this week we watched a movie on ClearPlay that took place in China in the 1920's, and it was fascinating to see the clash of worldviews. The Western doctor had come to this town to try to stem the plague of cholera that was killing people by the thousands. He discovered that there was cholera in the water that they were drinking. So the Western doctor was trying to get them to stop burying their dead right at the water's edge, because the new corpses were seeping cholera into the water, and then the people were drinking it. But the Chinese peasants just didn't get it. For them, cholera had nothing to do with germs, and everything to do with spirits. So it was imperative that the dead be buried right by the water so that the spirits would be appeased. And nothing he could say would disabuse them of that. They were both seeing the same facts, but they were seeing them through the lens of different worldviews. Some of the educated Chinese had a mixture of worldviews, and they were inconsistent in their responses.

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<sup>2</sup> James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervaristy Press, 1976), p. 17.

And there is a lot of inconsistency in the Christian church because we have adopted our ideas of what is normal from the world. And you can see it in entertainment, education, sports, modesty and a whole host of area. Just as one example, many Christians never stop to think about the worldview that shapes a medical opinion. They just take a medical doctor's advice as Gospel truth. Often that works out great, but sometimes it does not. When I was growing up most of my friends had their tonsils taken out routinely when the children were young. There was nothing wrong with the tonsils. The doctors had just been taught that it was an evolutionary vestige that had no purpose and it was only going to cause problems in the future. Because medicine was an unquestioned authority for these Christians, they didn't think about the evolutionary presuppositions that factored into the advice, and millions had their perfectly good tonsils taken out.

On the other hand, some Christians don't have medical science as their unthinking authority. Instead, they automatically believe everything their chiropractor or alternative medicine doctor prescribes without considering the eastern philosophy that some of the practices come out of. Some of the new fad diets (like the Blood Type Diet) are just rife with evolutionary presuppositions. Now I am not saying that there is not good in both approaches to medicine. Everyone can stumble on the truth. I am saying that there is no such thing as neutrality, and we have got to be very careful about automatically adopting authorities into our lives without checking them against the ultimate authority, the Bible. It is our worldview that makes us think that some things are weird and other things are normal. We just do it without even thinking. Ultimately, there are only two worldviews: Christian and non-Christian. So we ought not to be surprised when people think that what we do is nuts. Your worldview will determine what you think is normal.

I thought it was important that we cover that before we dive into Roman numeral points II and III, because these people were doing what was quite natural to their worldview. I think Paul's interaction with these pagans can give us helpful insights into interacting with the culture wars of our day.

### ***B. "Beatlemania" (v. 11-18)***

There are some differences between their culture and ours. For example, America tends to be much more individualistic than theirs. It would be hard to get American's to spontaneously start shouting like these guys did on the streets. We would feel uncomfortable. American's tend to be a bit more shy – with two notable exceptions: sports events and Rock concerts. Sometimes political events can be similar, and the Nazi rallies

definitely were. But it is amazing how Rock concerts can have the whole crowd shouting the same thing as a cohesive unit, and even doing weird things as a cohesive unit, even though the people will resort to being individualists when they leave. Anyway, imagine this as being like a huge rock concert where everyone is shouting with excitement to their celebrities. Verse 11 says, **They raised their voices, saying.** The idea is that is given there is a united chorus chanting an approval of their newfound heroes. No doubt, the priest in verse 13 takes advantage of this, and just like a skillful rock concert manager, he milks it with ceremony to gain maximum advantage. He's not going to let this opportunity slip. It doesn't matter what the apostles say or do in verses 14-17, the crowds will not be disabused of the fact that these two men are great, and greatly to be praised. Even with the negative words, verse 18 says, **And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.** This is an emotionally charged atmosphere that we could liken to Beatlemania.

The Journal of the American Sociological Society speaks of these things as "rituals of solidarity." Because our worldview has changed in America, some of the pagan rituals now seem normal even to Christians at Christian rock concerts. 100 years ago they would have thought that you were a nut to be doing body surfing and screaming yourself hoarse at a rock concert. But I just want you to think about this idea of what seems normal as flowing from worldview. Don't just ask if the actions are Biblical. That is important, but also ask if the worldview that makes them seem normal is Biblical. We've got to challenge our presuppositions.

### *C. Deification (v. 11b)*

#### **1. Where they culturally got their idea**

A second area in the clash of worldviews can be seen in verse 11 where they say, **the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!**" Paul and Barnabas are horrified. Anything approaching deification was blasphemy in their eyes, but it was totally normal for these Lyconians. Verse 12 – **And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.**

Why would they assume that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul Hermes? Some of it may have had to do with looks. Zeus was the older looking and more imposing figure, and the text says that Paul was the speaker just as Hermes was the god of speech. But that still doesn't answer the question of why they would have immediately jumped to this conclusion. Well, according to Greek mythology, Zeus and Hermes once visited Lystra



disguised as human visitors and tried to get hospitality. They visited 1000 homes and were not invited into one, until finally, one couple by the name of Philemon and his wife Baucis welcomed them into their home and fed them, despite the fact that they were very poor and didn't have much food to spare. According to this legend, Zeus rewarded the couple by converting their home into a beautiful temple, and when the couple died, turning them into two beautiful trees whose branches were intertwined. The rest of the homes were destroyed and the place was turned into a swamp. And of course, the local temple claims to have been the one built by Zeus. Well, based on their religion, the citizens expected Zeus and Hermes to come back. And part of their lore was, "You better be hospitable when they come." This miracle was so beyond anything that they had seen that they must have assumed that this could not be attributed to any lesser deity. It must be the return of Zeus and Hermes themselves. But the main point that I was making is that they were deifying these men.

## 2. Similarities to modern phenomenon

Modern Americans deify their rock stars, and occasionally will deify other public figures or historical figures. And boy! – try to point out any defect in their heroes and you are dead meat. But let's just think of the way rock stars are treated. When I have watched pictures of groupies going crazy over a singer I've thought to myself, "This would have been considered blasphemy 100 years ago." Even pagans would not have considered it normal because the predominant worldview that even pagans were influenced by was a Christian worldview.

Now I admit, very few people today will *say* that they are treating the rock stars as gods. Some groupies have been quoted as doing so. I came up with a couple dozen quotes. And a few rock stars have felt that way. Rocker Frank Zappa died in 1993, and he would be one example. He said, "*We have our own worshippers who are called 'groupies.' Girls will give their bodies to musicians as you would give a sacrifice to a god*" (Peters Brothers, What About Christian Rock, p. 17).

But usually people won't officially say that the rocker is a god. That's not cool – at least it's not cool *yet*. Instead, they will simply treat him as a god through loyalty, patronage, study and pre-occupation. As one person said rather tongue-in-cheek, "First of all, you must educate yourself in every minute detail concerning what I do and do not like. You know, my favorite color, restaurant, animal, my sign, my preferred top-notch clothing designer, my pet-peeves, "turn ons" and "turn offs". You can do this by reading any of the celebrity centered, teeny-bopper magazines around. If all else fails, just

look for stuff with a huge picture of me plastered to it, looking perfectly airbrushed and flawless. I'm sure you will be able to ingest excessive amounts of me and everything pertaining to ME. [And the "ME" is capitalized. He goes on] In case you haven't figured it out yet, this *isn't* about you having a hobby or even a "healthy interest" in someone well known and admired." And his point was – "Wow! This is a devotion worthy of a god, even though they know I am not one."

***D. Making Paul and Barnabas celebrities based on their performance (vv. 11-13)***

Another interesting parallel is that Paul and Barnabas are treated as celebrities *not* based on character, but simply based on performance. These people knew nothing about Paul and Barnabas. They don't know if they are strange, perverts, upright, low IQ or brilliant. They don't care. What they want is a performance and excitement. And they don't want you to question their defects anymore than Americans want you to question the defects of their own political celebrities.

***E. Worshipping man (v. 13, 18)***

Then of course there is the worship in verse 13. **Then the priest of Zeus** [he's going to be the manager of this group. "Then the priest of Zeus"], **whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes...** And these multitudes fit into the current norm of frenzied adoration quite easily. Despite the attempts of Paul and Barnabas to stop them, the crowds do what is normal. Verse 18 shows that they weren't really listening. The crowds hear what they want to hear. They are there for the experience, and verse 18 says, **And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitude from sacrificing to them.**

Not even Rock stars can always control their crowds. But I don't think it is a stretch to say that both rock concerts and some political conventions can stir up their people to on occasion do what approaches worship. I tell you, some of the political conventions I have seen sound just as worshipful as the crowds did of Hitler. But the degree of devotion that people give to modern figures, Christian or non-Christian would have received the same horror from Paul and Barnabas. One fan of the Backstreet boys is quoted in People Magazine as saying, "I love Nick! For Nick, I'll die. If God says, 'Die and let Nick live,' I'll do that" ("Boy Wonders," *People Magazine*, Sept. 14, 1998). A fan of Britney Spears is quoted as saying, "I'm obsessed. I'd do anything for her. . . I LIVE FOR BRITNEY SPEARS, you don't

understand. I live for Britney Spears. I live for her. . . Like my life wouldn't be complete without her" (on *ET*, July 10, 1999).

Grateful Dead concerts were described as “a place to worship” by more than one magazine. Gary Greenberg paid a tribute to Jerry Garcia, saying, “The band was the high priest, the audience the congregation, the songs the liturgy, and the dancing the prayer” (Gary Greenberg, *Not Fade Away: the Online World Remembers Jerry Garcia*, p. 42). Another author said, “... the Dead’s legendary live concerts bear uncanny resemblance to religious festivals...” (*Stairway to Heaven*, p. 196). Garcia himself said, “... on a certain level it’s a religion to me, too.”

Judy Mowatt, one of Bob Marley’s backup singers said, ““It was a crusade, it was a mission. We were like sentinels, like lights. On tour the shows were like church; ... There were mixed emotions in the audience: you see people literally crying, people in a frenzy, on a spiritual high... These concerts were powerful and highly spiritual. There was a power that pulled you there. It was a clean feeling... For months and maybe years it stays with you.” (Sean Dolan, *Bob Marley*, p. 95).

Now I bring all of this up because I want you to evaluate why you do the things that you do at Christian Rock Concerts. Many of the practices are taken right over from the pagan concerts. Just because it feels normal does not make it right. Christian Rock artists repeatedly have to warn their audiences to worship God, not them. Why? Because they know it is happening all the time. Yet the same patterns of worship that the world engages in are still offered up. None of this is neutral, and we need to evaluate why our worldview thinks things are normal that 100 years ago would have been found to be revolting. Is it simply an issue of being old fashioned, or would Paul and Barnabas have run amongst the crowd with horror today as well. I just want you to think about that.

### **III. Moxie – creative boldness in confronting the pagan worldview with the Christian worldview (vv. 14-17)**

#### ***A. Boldness – trying to stop a crowd***

We’ve looked at the miracle and the misunderstanding. Let’s look next at the moxie with which Paul and Barnabas confronted this pagan worldview head on. The dictionary defines moxie as courage and boldness mixed with inventiveness. The boldness can be seen in their willingness to run amongst the crowd and try to stop them. If you’ve ever studied the problems with crowd control, that’s not a cool thing to do. You don’t find Rock Stars running through their crowds, or they might not get back out. But

the boldest thing is their words. Paul and Barnabas are obviously very upset with the crowd, and don't try to hide it. Verse 14 says, **But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things?"** To tear your clothes was the highest form of disapproval that they could give. This was not simply a gentle disagreement. This was a bold rebuke.

***B. Inventiveness – taking advantage of crowd to preach***

The inventiveness can be seen in that they take advantage of their audience's attention by preaching to the crowd. They don't just leave. They engage the crowd to the kingdom's advantage. And I love the moxie of these men. It is in part why their lives counted, were exciting and were worth living. I remember Ted Turner talking about the boringness of life. He said, "Life is like a B-grade movie--you don't want to leave in the middle of it, but you don't want to see it again either!" And that's the way most Christians live their lives – never challenged with excitement for the cause of Christ. But we don't want our lives to be simply B-grade movies. We want every moment of our lives to count. And if that is going to happen, it is imperative that we live our lives for God with a consistent worldview. Let's notice the all-out war of worldviews.

***C. Notice the all-out war of worldviews***

**1. Seeing cultural idolatry as grievous (v. 14)**

I've already mentioned the first one. Paul and Barnabas don't take a "who-cares" attitude toward idolatry. They tore their clothes. Idolatry was offensive to them, even when they were the ones being idolized. If God does not give to us a holy revulsion for idolatry, we won't have what it takes to resist being made an idol. And any of us can be idols. Children will often treat Mom or Dad as an idol and put us on a pedestal. And we can reinforce that by never exposing our sin, mistakes and limitations and by pretending to be perfect.

On the other hand, we can dethrone ourselves in a number of ways. Honestly discussing with our children the mistakes we've made in parenting or homeschooling. Another way is by confessing our sins. If we have sinned against our children, we should model to them what it means to humble ourselves and seek their forgiveness. We can make it clear to them that we are not the ultimate authority; God is. If we are doctors or other experts, we can dethrone ourselves by admitting we don't know everything. But verse 14

shows that Paul and Barnabas see idolatry as very, very grievous. One book that will help you to not only see the presence of idols in our culture, but also to learn to hate them as God does, is the book, *Idols for Destruction*, by Herbert Schlossberg. It is probably the best critique of American culture that I have read.

## 2. Creator/creature distinction (v. 15)

The second thing that Paul does is to show the creator/creature distinction. Verse 15 says, **We also are men with the same nature as you.** They are saying, "God is God and we are not. There is a vast difference between God and us." And our worldview helps us to see the inherent limitations of the creatures. If we see the state as the final authority on all legal issues, then we do not understand the creator/creature distinction. We have bought into some of the pagans' worldview. We need to remember that politicians are men subject to error just like we are, and we cannot deify the state. If we bristle when people suggest that we could be mistaken, we deny for the moment our limitations. I used to hate my creaturely limitations of needing sleep. I tried to get by with as little as possible until I had a health crash and God showed me that I am mere flesh and I better start acting like it and get the sleep I need. Humanity is dependent, not independent. It is fallible, not infallible. It is finite, not infinite. There is no way that humans can give perfect justice, perfect answers, perfect affections or perfect anything. Don't treat your spouse as a love-god. They are going to fail because they have the same nature you do. And you need to give them grace when they do fail.

## 3. Antithesis

### a) A call to repentance (v. 15)

### b) Useless things

The third thing that Paul's worldview demands is antithesis. Antithesis means a clear demarcation between right and wrong, good and evil, blessing and cursing. For God there is no gray area. In modern culture we love to make everything OK and gray and mushy. Antithesis is the opposite of pluralism where everyone can believe everything, and that's OK for you, and something opposite is OK for me.

We see antithesis in this tiny message in two things: first, the willingness to call them to repentance. He told them that their purpose was to **preach to you that you should turn** [there's the repentance] **from these**

**useless things...** [there's the hard truth of what is good and what is bad; what is helpful and what is useless]

Too many Christians don't like that kind of antithesis. It's too impolite. They try to blur the line of antithesis to make more people feel comfortable. They have adopted pluralism somewhere near the center of their web of presuppositions. But without the antithesis being clearly articulated, the covenant is destroyed and we become like the backslidden Israelites in Judges. There is no area of life where God's boundaries or antithesis should not be seen.

#### 4. The doctrine of creation (v. 15)

The fourth thing that Paul brings to the front in this culture war is the doctrine of creation. **...to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.** None of them evolved. It's not that God started the process going by creating the protozoan ancestor and then gradually guided their evolution. No. Anything that can be found in heaven, earth or sea is created. It's not evolved; it's created. This stood in contradiction to ancient versions of evolution. Paul doesn't have time to say much about it, and it appears that the crowds are so enamored with the miracle that they just ignore that babbling. But at least his confrontation of evolution is there. The modern church has failed to do that. In fact, we have done the opposite. The church has embraced major parts of the world's evolutionary thinking and has tried to mingle it with the Bible, coming up with all sorts of strange theories. [Note: the following was omitted from the preached sermon, but may be of interest to readers: Here are some examples of evangelical attempts to fit billions of years into the six days of Genesis 1. There is the Pre-Genesis Gap theory<sup>3</sup>, the Gap Theory<sup>4</sup>, the Multiple Gap theory<sup>5</sup>, the Mid-Week Gap theory<sup>6</sup>, the Day Age theory<sup>7</sup>, the Pictorial

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<sup>3</sup> Also known as the Recreation-Revelation theory. This places 15 billion years of earth history before Genesis 1:1-2, and that these verses describe a recreation after judgment decimated a previous earth.

<sup>4</sup> Also known as the Ruin-Reconstruction Theory, Catastrophe theory or Interval Theory. Espoused by Dr. Thomas Chalmers and popularized by C.I. Scofield. This theory places an undefined (but long – most fit the 15 billion years of geologic history in here) period of time between verses 1 and 2. The angels were created before verse 1. There was a fall, and a judgment of the solar system or at least our planetary system before day 2. Verses 2 and following are not a re-creation, but a re-formation of the earth, and a clearing of the clouds and/or darkness that kept the sun, moon and stars from appearing on the earth. Only a few things needed to be created in this second period – man's spirit and soul being one of them.

<sup>5</sup> Also known as the Intermittent Day theory. The six days are literal days in which God brought creative intervention, but vast ages exist between each day. Some say that a creative process described was begun on a given day, but that creative development continued. In any case, unlike the Day Age theory, the days are seen as literal days separated by billions of years.

<sup>6</sup> Also known as the Biblical Reality theory. This divides the creative week into two parts. Days 1-3 occurred billions of years ago. Days 4-6 occurred 10,000 years ago. During the first three literal days,

Day/Moderate Concordism theory<sup>8</sup>, the Hesitation Theory<sup>9</sup>, the Edenic Creation theory<sup>10</sup>, the Figurative Day theory<sup>11</sup>, the Cosmogonic Day theory<sup>12</sup>, the Relativity Day theory<sup>13</sup>, the Days of Revelation theory<sup>14</sup>, the Days of Divine Fiat theory<sup>15</sup>, the Revelatory Device theory<sup>16</sup>, the Framework Hypothesis<sup>17</sup>, the Two-Register Cosmology theory (actually a subtype of the Framework Hypothesis, but rejected by some Framework interpreters)<sup>18</sup>, the

God created the sun, moon, stars, earth and ancient animals (thus the geological record). During, days 4-6 God created man and modern animals.

<sup>7</sup> Also known as Progressive Creationism. Each day represents an age of billions of years. Each age is correlated to secular geology.

<sup>8</sup> The view of Bernard Ramm. This sees “the creation days in Genesis as pictorial representations of the major creative events. These events are coupled with progressive creationism but are not considered as a literal chronology of their occurrence.”

<sup>9</sup> The view of William Stokes and Gordan Gray. Like the gap theory, this posits a long period of time in which the universe was created (v. 1), and then much later, six literal days in which the earth is formed and made habitable. However, unlike the gap theory, this does not see any judgment before verse 2.

<sup>10</sup> Also called the local creation theory. This view says that Genesis 1 is simply talking about God’s creation of the Garden of Eden (or some say, the Middle East), and thus “land” instead of “earth.” John Pye Smith held to this view.

<sup>11</sup> It is not clear to me why this is a different view from the Day Age theory or the Pictorial Day theory. But apparently, the proponents want things to be a bit fuzzier than those two views allow. Dr. Perry Phillips argues that evening and morning are used for the gradual closing of one period and beginning of another. He also argues that in Genesis 1:26-31 it appears that man and woman were created on the same day, yet chapter 2 shows so many things occurring between Adam’s creation and Eve’s creation that they could not possibly have occurred in one literal day. He opts for a nebulous figurative day.

<sup>12</sup> The days are simply seen as religious or theological statements about creation, and that they are modeled after pagan cosmogonies, but refuting those pagan polytheistic errors. Claus Westerman, Karl Barth hold to this, but many have adopted variations on its theme, some sounding more evangelical than others.

<sup>13</sup> Also known as the “Expanding Time theory Gerald Shroeder, Derek Humphreys espouse this view. “The six days are literal 24-hour periods from a cosmic perspective, long ages from the earth’s perspective.”

<sup>14</sup> They claim that these are six literal days on which God gave revelation to Moses. The days only show the timing of the revelation, not of the creative processes being described.

<sup>15</sup> God took six literal, consecutive days to command the universe to come into being, but the commands did not take effect right away, or necessarily in the same order.

<sup>16</sup> The days are like phases in a construction project.

<sup>17</sup> The creation week is seen as a metaphor, not a sequence of time. This metaphor is used as a convenient device to poetically describe creation in topical fashion with the kingdoms being created on days 1-3 and the rulers or the kingdoms being created on days 4-6.

<sup>18</sup> Developed by Meredith Kline as a refinement to the Framework Hypothesis and a philosophical adjunct to it. Some Framework Hypothesis people have rejected it. This posits two registers: a lower register (time bounded, natural, earth history) and the upper register (timeless, supernatural, heavenly activity). “Therefore, when we find that God’s upper level activity of issuing creative fiats from his heavenly throne is pictured as transpiring in a week of earthly days, we readily recognize that, in keeping with the pervasive contextual pattern, this is a literary figure, an earthly, lower register time metaphor for an upper register, heavenly reality” (p. 7). The implication is that we cannot know anything of timing whatsoever since the upper register is above time. This complex theory provides a overarching umbrella within which Kline holds to the framework hypothesis. However, many Framework Hypothesis people do not accept Kline’s two-register view of history that appears somewhat Gnostic. Therefore it is better to distinguish this theory from the Framework Hypothesis, even though they are in many respects identical.

Analogical Day theory<sup>19</sup>, the Day Peak theory<sup>20</sup> and the preparation of Palestine theory<sup>21</sup>. Actually, last month I ran across another one that holds that days 2-7 are literal days, but that day one is billions of years. And all of these claim that it was exegesis that drove them to their position. They insist that they aren't being influenced by the world. Well, 19 views later and you can understand why some Christians have become cynical. What used to be a chapter simple enough for a child to understand in the 3400 years since Moses, has now become so complex that even the experts insist that no one should be dogmatic, and that all the interpretations have a certain validity. Well, I think you can excuse Christians if they begin to be a bit cynical. Let's stick to the Bible.] We need to restore creationism to the church's worldview.

### 5. Monotheism versus Polytheism (v. 15-17)

The next area of conflict was Paul's mention of the "living God" as opposed to the "useless things" they were doing. And the fact that all things originated from this living God stands in such contrast to the Greek idea that each god blesses people within their own limited sphere of influence. I don't know if you realize it, but those were bold words. And I think they are important words. We are too prone to give God only certain areas of jurisdiction in our lives. But if there is only one God, and all things came from Him, then He has authority over all things. To exclude God from politics is to acknowledge polytheism. The same is true if we exclude God from other areas of life. So to these polytheists he affirms monotheism.

### 6. The doctrine of law/sin (v. 16)

The next doctrine that Paul brings up is the doctrine of law and sin. Verse 16 says, **who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.** Walking in their own ways refers to their rebellion that he has just finished saying they need to turn from. The fact that God allowed nations in the past to wander does not endorse their wandering.

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<sup>19</sup> I'm not sure that I can accurately describe this theory because it is very mushy. Each of the "days" are God's workdays, but they are not human days, but only analogous in some way to human days. They may (or may not) represent long ages. There may (or may not) be overlap between the days. These days may (or may not) be chronological. The days are "successive periods of unspecified length. They may overlap in part, or may reflect logical rather than chronological criteria for grouping certain events on certain days."

<sup>20</sup> "This claims that Genesis is a generalized account of major events. Thus while day 5 records the creation of birds - that does not mean that no birds were created before that day, simply that the day was the major period of bird-creation."

<sup>21</sup> This describes not creation, but the preparation of the land of Canaan for Israelite conquest.



## 7. The doctrine of providence (v. 17)

And then finally comes the doctrine of providence. Paul indicates that they were without excuse because it is clear that God is involved in every detail of life. Verse 17 says, **Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.** Paul didn't say everything that could have been said. He was rushed and taken off guard. Nevertheless, I think you can see from my outline that it is remarkable how he includes so many things that stood in conflict with the pagan worldview. He didn't have time to think about it. It just came out. But that is the cool thing about worldviews. They enable you to think and process and come to conclusions instantly. If you have already developed Christian worldview, you can't help but think and act out Christianly. Every word that comes out of your mouth, even under stressful situations like this one, will carry the savor of the true worldview with it. That's why Romans 12 says it is so critical to be transformed through the renewing of our thinking. Worldviews are powerful. I am just staggered at how easily all of those things were said. But Paul had a clearly developed worldview.

## IV. Mutability – the fickleness of man (vv. 18-19)

### A. *Crowds treat them as heroes in verse 18*

But these pagans reject what he has to say. Or a better way of saying it is that they filter what he had to say through the filters of their worldview. That's another function that worldviews have. They automatically filter out distracting information that is considered irrelevant. But this is also frustrating. You can talk clearly to people and present all kinds of facts, and still not be convincing until one of two things happen: 1) you either so overwhelm them with facts that don't fit into their paradigm that they are forced to adopt a new paradigm or 2) you attack their foundational presuppositions and help them to realize that they aren't interpreting the facts neutrally. It's almost like they aren't listening in verse 18. It says, **And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.** These guys are even more pumped. They heard about the blessings that God has given, and filtered out all the rest. But that's the way worldviews affect us. It's impossible to think without some filters in place. It's one of the limitations of our finite nature that we can't analyze every fact at once. So every human has a paradigm through which we filter and interpret data. The key is making sure your filters are Biblical ones.

Another way of saying it is that we can't just endlessly argue about the facts. We've got to challenge the assumptions by which they interpret the facts.

I've put down the fourth M as being Mutability. They are so fickle. In verse 18 they adore Paul and Barnabas and in verse 19 they kill them. You can't put your trust in crowds. They are fickle. Crowds are easily manipulated. But crowds can also turn ugly if the celebrities don't do what they had hoped. Many sports heroes have found this to be true. You can be a hero one day and a bum the next day because you lost the football game.

***B. Crowds treat them as traitors in verse 19.***

In verse 19 they turn ugly. **Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.**

**1. The manipulators - persistent Jews who followed them from Antioch, to Iconium to Lystra.**

It's amazing how persistent these Jews from Antioch have been. That was way back in chapter 13. Those Jews hounded them from Antioch to Iconium, and from Iconium to Lystra. They were a tiny minority, yet they continued to play havoc with Paul all the way through the book of Acts. This highlights yet another feature of worldviews – they can make us blind to evidence. This is why I like the Answers in Genesis organization. They are presuppositional. They don't just endlessly haggle over the facts. They aim their cannons at the foundations, which are the presuppositions. And they are constantly re-evaluating their own presuppositions to make sure that they are Biblical.

We aren't told what they said to get the Gentiles upset. It's not as if Jews were heroes themselves. But whether they told the Gentiles the truth or lies, it obviously got the Gentiles angry enough to stone Paul.

**2. The manipulated**

**a) All out worship (v. 18)**

**b) All out hatred (v. 19)**

So they have moved from all out worship of Paul and Barnabas to all out hatred. If your longing is to receive the approval of man, forget it. It will be short-lived. It will let you down. The only approval you should strive for is being well pleasing in God's eyes.

V. **Mettle – the spirit, courage and strength of character of Paul (vv. 20-21)**

A. *Four amazing things in Paul*

1. **Boldness in facing the crowds**

But I want to end with one more M from this chapter: mettle. Mettle refers to spirit, courage and strength of character. We've already seen it in the bold way Paul ran among the crowd and preached to them.

2. **Disciples gathering around Paul to pray for him (v. 20)**

But we can see two more examples of mettle. The disciples in verse 20 show mettle when they identify with a guy that has just been stoned. Verse 20 says, **However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up...** That would take some courage to gather. You could be the next one stoned. These disciples were given a supernatural boldness to not flee or give up the faith. And you can be given the same mettle when it is needed. When I was a kid I used to worry about whether I would abandon the faith if I was tortured. And my parents encouraged me not to worry about something theoretical and so distant – that God would give the boldness needed when the need arose, not before.

3. **His going “into the city” (v. 20) and back to the previous cities (v. 21)**

But the next example of mettle is in the rest of the text. It says of Paul, **he rose up and went into the city.** That may be the most amazing thing in this whole story. Certainly the healing was amazing. Certainly the reception of Paul and Barnabas as gods was an amazing, and disconcerting turn of events. Certainly Paul's stoning by the same crowd was amazing. But perhaps the most amazing thing is that Paul goes right back into the city that has stoned him. He leaves the next day and departs for Derbe. But he doesn't leave his mettle behind. Verse 21 indicates that he goes back to the three cities that have persecuted him previously (and from which these killers came) and solidifies the churches there.

I would conclude this message by encouraging you to not be enamored by the enthroning that people want to give you, nor be fearful of the stoning that the same crowd might dish out. Make God the center of the web of presuppositions that controls your life. Cast out any portions of the web that make you think like the world, because they will weaken you under

pressure. Strengthen your worldview and your stability in life will be more and more like Paul's. Your life won't be a boring B-rated movie either. It will be a movie with meaning, adventure and purpose. And it will be a life that is guaranteed to make a difference. Make it so Lord. Amen.