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South Walton Church of Christ in Destin Florida sponsors the following presentation by Evangelist John Morris who serves under the Eldership of the Murray Road Church of Christ of Lee's Summit, Missouri.

### Here is the first lesson in the series: **The Bible: Can It Be Trusted?** Part One of Six

In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts we have the Apostle Paul on one of his missionary journeys and he comes to the ancient city of Thessalonica. While there his preaching is received by some but there are a group of Jews there who are so envious of the reception he's getting that they end up driving him out of the city and he finds himself in the city of Berea. While there he encounters a very different sort of person, he meets a group of people who are more "fair minded" than those in Thessalonica and they receive his word with joy and a great many of them follow him. However those Jews in Thessalonica who'd created so much trouble for him there, hear what's going on in Berea and they follow him to Berea, stir up the people again and Paul finds himself escorted by the brethren down to the famed city of Athens where he can be safe from these Jews.

When he gets to Athens he's alone, which is uncommon for Paul. He's going to wait there a time for Timothy and Silas to join him and while there, we read in Acts chapter 17, that Paul wandered through the city of Athens and was provoked by what he saw. Paul was a true evangelizer, and when he saw the city given over to idols he could not be silent. He was provoked to speak and this he did in the Synagogue and in the marketplace. He managed to garner the attention of two of the philosophical groups, the Stoics and the Epicureans who stood on either side of the philosophical spectrum. They took him to the city court, to the Areopagus (or Mars Hill) and there Paul had what you might call the opportunity of a lifetime: to speak the truth to the highest philosophical court of that place. Paul had quite an opportunity but "What Should He Do?"

The Athenians did not buy the Old Testament scriptures. Paul could have spoken to the Jews and quoted from the Old Testament to make the case that Jesus was the Christ but he couldn't do that in Athens. What could he say to bring these people to a belief in the one, true & living God and His son Jesus Christ? Well, beginning in verse 24 of Acts 17 we learn. Paul said this to them; "God, who made the world and everything in it, *SINCE* He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." Beginning in verse 24 we get from Paul 3 "*SINCE*" statements, in other words: *SINCE* the "Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22) Paul was going to "reason" with them. He was going to give them some wisdom: 3 statements to prove that God must be different than they perceived Him. In verse 24 he begins by pointing out: "God, who made the world and everything in it,"

The Greeks already acknowledged that there had been divine intervention when it came to the creation of the world, so he says: *SINCE* God made the world and everything in it, verse 24, it doesn't make sense that He could be confined in these temples you've made from the very things that He made. That's not reasonable; God must be greater than the creation itself. How then could you possibly hope to give Him a home made from this creation? In 1 Kings 8:27 Solomon said: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold; heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have made!" and Paul was appealing to that very truth.

In verse 25 of Acts 17 Paul goes on to make another point to these Greeks, he says: "Nor is He (God) worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, **SINCE** He gives to all; life, breath, and all things." The word "Worshiped" in the original language is the word "**Therapeuo**" (Pron: ther-ap-yoo'-o) it sounds like our word "Therapy" and it's where we get that word. "**Therapeuo**" means: "to wait upon, to adore God" but in physical sense. It was a common idea among the pagans and a common idea among the Greeks that their sacrifices somehow **SUSTAINED** God and Paul is saying once again: "Does this make any sense?" "God gives to everyone, life, breath and all things." How can you possibly think then that your sacrifices are sustaining Him? God said in Psalm 50:12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine and all its fullness."

Finally Paul offers a third reasonable "**SINCE**" statement in verse 29, he says: "Therefore, **SINCE** we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art or man's devising." We, the Greeks acknowledged, are the offspring, the product of the work of God. Now we know Paul says that the human essence cannot be fully captured in art, cannot be fully captured in anything that man would make, how much less then, the "Divine Nature", the very essence of God?

And yet that's precisely what they were doing. They had all these temples, they had these idols and saying "here is God, or the gods" and Paul says "This doesn't make any sense, you can't capture a man much less God Himself in such a thing." Paul reasoned with these Greeks. They wouldn't accept the scriptures but he could begin by reasoning with them. Having done so in verse 28, he then turned his attention to "Authorities" that the Greeks regarded as legitimate. In verse 28 Paul says: "In Him (in God) we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said: "for we are also His offspring,"

Paul was quoting a poet from his home city of Tarsus. Aratus of Tarsus lived about 270 B.C. and had written a very famous work for the Greeks known as "**Phoenomena**." This work was so highly esteemed among Greek individuals that many learned men wrote commentaries on it. The Greeks regarded it as authoritative. To them a poet, at least sometimes, was more than just someone who could speak inspiring words but someone who may have spoken **FROM** some level of inspiration.

When Paul quotes the Greek poet Epimenides in Titus 1:12 he uses the Greek word "**prophetes**" (Pron: pro'-fay-tays) the word "prophet" to show here how the Greeks viewed them. So when Paul quoted Aratus here in Acts 17 he was appealing to a source that the Greeks viewed as authoritative. By reasoning with them, by appealing to **THEIR** sources Paul hoped to persuade them that there was one true and living God and from there to make the case for Christ and we learn from Acts 17 that he succeeded, this worked.

Ours is an increasingly paganistic society. Fewer and fewer people in America possess a Biblical Faith and more and more of them are saying that Biblical Faith is not worth their while. How can we, as Bible believers, hope to persuade these people that what the Bible says is true? We can follow no better course than that of Paul's, "let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18) and let us appeal to the sources that we are agreed upon.

End of Lesson One Part One

