

## **Apologetics & Respect**

Let us pray together.

*Heavenly Father, we want to thank You that you are the one who has committed Yourself to caring for us and the whole creation. The earth is full of Your unfailing love, as the Psalmist says, and we praise You, Father, for that. Thank You for those examples of Your love that each of us has experienced in our lives today of safety, health, food, comfort, friendship, family and so many gifts that You give us to fill our hearts with joy. Father, teach us, we pray, in this time. We thank you that You have promised that You will. So, Father, we ask that You will be with us as we think together. In Jesus' name, amen.*

I have entitled our section, "Paul among the Pagans: all Things to all People." Before the break I spoke about the way the Luke has recorded for us in this middle section of the book of Acts three evangelistic messages delivered by Paul in very different circumstances. The first is from Acts 13:13. Paul is on his first missionary journey and after he has been at Paphos on the island of Cyprus, they go by sea across to Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark leaves them at that point to return to Jerusalem. And then they go from Perga inland to Pisidian Antioch. Pisidian Antioch is in the center toward the south, sort of center south of modern-day Turkey. That is where Paul gives the first of his messages in the synagogue. And it is a message that is given to Jews and to God-fearing Gentiles. Most of the synagogues at that time had many, many Gentiles attending and worshipping at them, for example, Cornelius, who we read about a few weeks back as we were looking at preachers visiting his home. He was a God-fearer worshipping at the local synagogue.

Luke tells us that Paul's custom whenever he arrived in any city was to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and begin his evangelistic ministry there. But in the city of Philippi there was no synagogue. So he went to a place of worship where a group of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles were gathered down by the river. His custom whenever he could was to go to the synagogue to begin his ministry there, and that is what we read about in Acts 13:14 onward: "On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.'" What is being described here is the custom in that day when visitors came to synagogues; the elders of the synagogue would invite them to speak. The teaching was not done simply by the chief ruler of the synagogue or even by the elders; the teaching could be done by any of the men in the synagogue who were qualified and competent to do so. And so when visitors came, they would be courteously asked, as on this occasion, if they would like to say something. And, of course, it gave Paul a wonderful opportunity to preach the Gospel, which is what he does. Often after that first of several Sabbaths, he would no longer be welcome at the synagogue. We read of several examples like that in the book of Acts. But when he has the opportunity, that is where he begins his work in any city to which he comes. That is the first message.

The second is recorded for us in Acts 14:14 in the city of Lystra. In this case Paul and Barnabas are responding to attempts by the pagans in the city of Lystra to offer sacrifices to them as if they were gods. What is interesting about this, historically, is a legend from this particular part of contemporary Turkey. There was a legend at that time that the gods Zeus and Hermes had visited that part of the country. That is why the people pick the names of those two particular gods when they see this miracle. They decide that Paul is Hermes because Hermes was known for his wise speech. He is one of the gods of wisdom and of wise speech, so they think that Paul is Hermes and Barnabas is Zeus. After this layman is healed they want to offer the sacrifices to them. The priest of Zeus comes to help them in this,

bringing bulls and wreaths. Then we hear Paul's words as he seeks to prevent them from offering a sacrifice. This is the second message.

The third we find in Acts 17 later on in Paul's ministry; this is set in the city of Athens. Athens was one of the most prominent cities in Greece and at that time was part of the Roman province of Achaia. That is where Paul is. This time he is speaking in a setting that would be similar to a context today if you were invited to give a speech. Let us suppose you are pastor working for the Lord in a big city. It is as if all the professors at the local universities got together and asked you to come and address them. That is really the kind of prevalent situation that Paul is in at the Areopagus. He gets asked to speak to many of the intellectual leaders of the city of Athens. We read his message in Acts 17:22 onward.

As I pointed out to you, it is not an accident or a matter of chance that Luke has given us these three messages rather than giving us three synagogue sermons or talks to cultured pagans. Luke has carefully given us examples of Paul speaking in three different contexts, contexts that Paul was in repeatedly. In the city of Ephesus, for example, we read that Paul had discussions every day for three years. And during those three years he would have many times spoken to Jews and God-fearers, many times to uncultured pagans, to polytheists, many times to more cultured and intellectual pagans. Luke is showing us how Paul speaks in these different contexts.

Look at the message in the synagogue. We are going to look at these very carefully as we go along, but I want to summarize some things that are immediately obvious. Look at Acts 13:16: "Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: 'Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert.'" Clearly, Luke is summarizing what Paul said. You can read this through in a couple of minutes. Paul, we can be sure, spoke for considerably longer than that, as preachers usually do. But if we think about this message as we start reading the first words, we notice some things immediately about the language and the content. This message is filled with Old Testament language and it is also full of allusions to Old Testament texts. In these few words I have just read to you, we are reading about the period of the Exodus, the wanderings in the desert, the behavior of the people there, God's mercy to them, and the challenge of God having to endure their unbelief and disobedience during those years in the desert. This message is filled with allusions to events recorded for us in the Old Testament. If you look down through it, you will see the next section speaks about Samuel, Saul, and then David. He gives a quote in verse 22: "He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'" Then he goes on to speak about Christ coming as a descendent of David. In the latter section, he has several quotes from the Psalms and the Prophets. He uses various messianic psalms like Psalm 2 and 16 and various sections of Isaiah 55 and 49 and also Habakkuk. So the language and the content of this message are very clearly drawn from the Old Testament.

As we think about this message we might reflect on it by asking, "What can Paul take for granted as he speaks in the synagogue? What can he assume about his hearers?" I have made a list of—it is not an exhaustive list, but it is a list of some of the primary understandings and knowledge that these people have—things that Paul can take for granted as he speaks to them in the synagogue. They have a belief in the personal Creator God who has revealed Himself, who has spoken to His people.

Second, they have an acceptance of the authority of the Old Testament. That is the background of everything here. Paul does not have to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the Old Testament or its

acceptance by these people who are listening to him. They are in the synagogue because they believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God, so he can take that for granted.

Third, he can take for granted that they are familiar with the content of the Old Testament. This message requires that the people know what Paul is talking about when he talks about the Exodus from Egypt. They knew about the wanderings in the wilderness and the unbelief of the people there. Likewise, they knew about the whole nation having to perish, not being allowed to enter the Promised Land (except for their children) because of their unbelief. They were familiar with Saul becoming the first king and then being replaced by David, son of Jesse. Paul knew these people were going to be thoroughly familiar with this. They all read from the Old Testament, from the Law and the Prophets, every Sabbath in the synagogue as well as any other reading they might have done themselves if they had access to texts. They did not all have Bibles like you and me, but they regularly heard God's Word read, so they were familiar with the content.

Fourth, Paul can take for granted that they expect the coming of the Messiah. The Old Testament is constantly speaking about the promise of the Messiah. The synagogues in the time of Paul were filled with messianic expectation and sometimes rumors and various people claiming to be the Messiah. There are several examples of this from the first century. Paul knew that these people expected the coming of the Messiah. God promised to send a deliverer to His people, Israel.

Fifth, Paul can assume that these people know that they are obliged to be obedient to the Law of Moses. That is at the very heart of the teaching of the synagogue and of Judaism of that time. One of the things that attracted the Gentiles to the synagogue was the high moral standards of Judaism. Many Gentiles were disgusted by the immorality of paganism. The gods of the Greeks and Romans and other nations were gods guilty of rape, murder, theft and every other kind of wickedness. One of the reasons why many people come to church when they feel pressured on behalf of their children and want their children to have some kind of moral instruction is because of the high moral standards in the church. In this culture you have lots of unbelievers coming to church for that reason. It was like that in Paul's day. Many Gentiles were excited about the moral teaching coming from the Old Testament and committed to seek to be obedient to that. There was an obligation to obey the Law of Moses.

Paul could have taken for granted as well that these people knew they were going to face God's judgment. It is a constant teaching of Scripture that they are going to have to give an account to God one day. These people are living with a recognition of their moral accountability to God.

Last, Paul can take for granted that John the Baptist's work is very widely known. You see later in the message that Paul talks about John the Baptist in Acts 13:24 and 25. Remember how it says in the Gospels that people came out from Jerusalem and from the whole of Judea to listen to John the Baptist. Knowledge of John the Baptist's ministry would have spread right across the Jewish dispersion. People in every synagogue would have known about the work of John the Baptist, so Paul can take that for granted. Later on, for example, in the book of Acts we read that a group of disciples of John the Baptist was in the city of Ephesus, also the western part of modern-day Turkey. All across the dispersion people in the synagogue would have known about John the Baptist's ministry.

They would also have heard something about the ministry of Jesus because that was not done in a corner. Jesus several times goes up to the temple to preach there. When he went to the temple to preach, and when he taught at the feasts, people from all over the dispersion would have heard him. People right across the Roman Empire in all the synagogues would have had some familiarity with the ministry of Jesus. So Paul is able to refer to this. He talks about the ministry of Christ in verse 27, saying, "The

people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.” He knows that they know something about the life and the death of Jesus. As you read this message in the synagogue, you can see quite clearly that Paul can assume all this as he speaks to these people and proclaims the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection and of salvation through faith in Him.

We need to ask ourselves a practical question. Can we assume that people coming to our churches today have this same kind of knowledge? Paul’s message is very similar to ones we hear every Sunday in our churches. But I want to ask you, can you take it for granted that people who come to your churches really understand all these things? Of course, those who are Christians already will indeed understand these things. But there are many people who come to our churches today who do not have the same kind of grasp as these eight points that Paul could take for granted in a synagogue in his day. You always need to ask yourself as you prepare to preach and teach in any context, “What do people know? What can I assume?” If you take these points, for example, at least 50% of the people out there (probably more like 60%) do not attend, and have never really attended in any regular fashion, a Christian church. At least half the population will not be familiar with these things. As a pastor in England for many years, I could not assume that anybody coming to church who was not already involved in our church would know these things. In fact, I had to assume that the overwhelming majority of English people, more than 90%, are totally ignorant of this knowledge.

In this country about 50% or more have absolutely no familiarity with these things. They might know the name of Jesus. There are also enormous numbers of people who have some kind of church background who also do not know these things very well. So if somebody has been going to a theologically liberal church, which lost the Gospel 20, 30, 40, 50 or even 100 years ago, they are not going to have these things taught clearly. That is not what they will have been hearing week by week. There are many people out there, including those who are churching to some degree who are not familiar with these things. I think a good estimate would be that you can assume that about 70% of the people around you are unfamiliar with these things in terms of really understanding them. The great majority of Americans, over 90%, say they believe in God. There is very little biblical content to that knowledge of God. There is certainly not a sense of moral accountability to God—that they are going to have to give an answer to Him one day. Among the great majority of people there is certainly no commitment to obey the laws of God.

You need to think about this when you are teaching people. What can you really take for granted? What do they really understand? If you do not ask that question, you are going to be speaking past people. They simply will not hear, especially if you are in a church that is growing, that is attracting unbelievers. Whether they have a church background of some kind or not, if you are in a church where unbelievers are coming, you cannot assume all of these things.

What about Paul’s message to pagans? There are two messages to the pagans, one in Acts 14 and another in Acts 17. There are very brief words here, so we can be sure Paul said more than this. He says in Acts 14:15, “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” In Acts 17:22-31 Paul says,

Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. 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 hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." 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 man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

That is a very different message from the message that is given in the synagogue. First think about the language. You see that the language and the content are very different from the message in the synagogue. There are no references to the Old Testament. It is not that this message is not biblical; it is completely biblical. In some ways you can read this message and it is like an exposition of the first chapters of Genesis. No, it is a completely biblical message about who God is and who we are as human persons made in His likeness. It is about idolatry, God's rule over the nations, His sovereignty, and other things like that. It is a completely biblical message, but the language is very different from the synagogue message. There are no references to the Old Testament. Paul does not quote the Old Testament, though as I said, in one sense, it is a thoroughly Old Testament message in terms of its content even though he does not quote it. He is not quoting the Prophets, Psalms and the Law. It would have served no purpose, of course, because the pagans were completely unfamiliar with it. They would not have known what he was quoting, and they did not regard it as having authority. So he makes no reference to the Old Testament. He makes no reference to the promises in the Old Testament of the Messiah. That language would have been particularly difficult for them to understand. He would have had to explain all about that: The term, "Messiah," means "anointed." God anointed His kings, His prophets, and His priests, and He promised He would send an anointed one, a Prophet, Priest, and King to come and deliver His people. He does not refer to those promises in the way that he did in the synagogue. The heart of his message in the synagogue is how Christ fulfilled the promises of the Messiah in the Old Testament. There are also no references, except for the resurrection at the end, to the details of recent events in Palestine in terms of the life and ministry of John the Baptist or the life and ministry of Jesus. This is because, again, these people were unfamiliar with that. It was not that Paul was not prepared to talk about those things. That is not the point I am making at all; but he has this opportunity; he is called before the Areopagus.

He has to think about where these people are, what their understanding is, and what he can take for granted. He cannot take for granted what he could assume when he spoke in a synagogue. What could Paul take for granted? What shaped his message? These are some of the basic things: he and the people to whom he is speaking are living in a created universe. That is the context in which we live. He can take for granted the experience of providence; that is, of God's rule over history, over the nations, and His care for the human race. In Acts 14 he talks about how God has not left Himself without a testimony. His testimony is His providential care; He provides you crops in their seasons, He fills your heart with joy. He is talking about the way God cares for the human race—and all people experience this.

Paul can take for granted that they have some knowledge of the nature of human persons. They believe there is something divine about humanity; they are God's offspring. There is something different about us; we are not like birds and trees and animals. There is something unique and glorious about human life. Paul can take for granted that these people have thought about that. We will come back to the quotes he gives later, but he does have some quotations here, though they are not from the Bible. He can take for granted that there are religious longings in the human heart, that these people are religious. In fact, that is where he starts his message. The whole message is about their religious understanding and what is right and wrong about it. He knows that they are people who have a longing for worship and a practice of worship. This is true of human beings everywhere. We are religious by nature. The book of Ecclesiastes says, "God has set eternity in our hearts." That is who we are. We have this longing for eternity, this longing to know God and to worship.

He can take for granted that they have some understanding of the inadequacy and inappropriateness of idolatry. There are these temples all around them with their statues and their sacrifices. He knows that these people in Athens already reflected on the problems of pagan religion and the inadequacy of idolatry in terms of who God is. Also, he knows that they have been thinking about the nature of God. We will talk more about some of what they thought about God later. We are told specifically there were stoics and epicureans here, so they are people who reflected about the nature of God. They asked, what is God like? They came to a very different conclusion from what one would be led to by the temples, altars, and pagan worship that was taking place there on Mars Hill. They have also reflected that this is a moral universe and there is going to be some kind of accountability. Human beings are going to be called to account one day on the basis of the way we live. That is something that almost all people everywhere have believed throughout history. We live in a culture today that is very different; it has lost that sense of moral accountability. It is very unusual in history, and there are particular reasons for that, some of which we have already spoken about. So Paul can take those things for granted as he speaks to Pagans, whether they are the pagan polytheists of the city of Lystra or the more thoughtful pagans in Athens. These things shaped his message because this is where the people were, so Paul spoke to them based on where they were. Not all of these understandings are always there, but many of them are going to be a constant.

In most situations where a Christian goes in our particular culture we have a problem with this last understanding of moral accountability. People certainly have a sense of good and evil, and they have some sense of their obligation to do good things. But many of them have lost a sense of accountability to God. They do not believe that they are going to have to give an answer to Him one day. It is one of the challenges we face in the culture in which we live. Many of these things in some form or another are going to be part of what we are going to run across almost anywhere we go. There are different challenges in a post-modern, secular setting, but some of these are going to be present even there. They are going to be at the heart of what we are going to have to be speaking about to people: uniqueness as human persons, understanding of a distinction between good and evil, and the clearly divine nature of the universe. That is why the vast majority of Americans believe in God. No matter how long they have been told not to, no matter how much they have been taught that the universe came about by chance, hardly anybody believes that. It so obviously does not make sense of a universe which is so clearly designed and patterned and structured. Many of these understandings are going to be there in some form or another, but you will not be able to use Christian terminology like "providence" to speak about them with many of the people around us. That is an introduction to these three messages and how different they are from each other.

That brings us to our next section, which I have entitled, "All Things to All People: Principles of Communication." When Paul preached to those with the Scriptures in the synagogue, he emphasized

Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy and the One who justifies those who have failed to fully keep the law. That is where he finishes his message in the city of Antioch. Through Christ, you can be justified from all those things that you fail to justify yourself as you have sought to obey God's law. Christ has kept the law where you have not. Christ has died to bear your judgment and has been raised again to a justification. When Paul preaches to those with the Scriptures, that is the heart of his message; Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus died to pay your judgment and rose for your justification. Repent and have faith in Him. When Paul preaches to those without the Scriptures, to the pagans, he is speaking from the early chapters of Genesis. He is speaking about the nature of the universe, the nature of God, and the nature of human persons and our failure to worship God. He speaks in particular about idolatry. Idolatry is going to be a constant wherever you go. If people do not worship God, they are going to be worshipping something else. That is at the very heart of Paul's message. At the end, he comes to how Christ delivers us from the judgment we face because of our idolatry. There is something interesting to notice here. People all need to hear the law before they hear the Gospel of Christ. With people who already know the God of Scriptures or know about Him, people who believe that they are called to obey God's commandments, much of the time you are going to be preaching on the second table of the law, the law about human relationships. (That is not really what the commandments are, but we will refer to them as that.) You will speak to them about our failure to love our neighbor as ourselves, about sexual sin, immorality, sinning against other people's property, theft, covetousness, lying, and the failure to speak truthfully. And often we are going to be preaching to those who are already churching from the second table of the law.

Sometimes even speaking to those who are churching, we will have to speak from the first table of the law about idolatry, about the failure to worship God alone. That is exactly what Jesus does with the wealthy young ruler. The wealthy young ruler is actually a leader of the synagogue. He is a thoroughly churching person. That is what the word "ruler" means there; he is an elder in the synagogue. That man is committed to serving and worshipping the true God, to obeying His law. He thinks he has kept the law from his childhood, but where Jesus challenges him is the issue of idolatry. Does he love God or does he love money? Who does he worship? Does he truly worship God alone? So Jesus preaches the law to him. He preaches from the first table of the law.

Almost always, in a pagan context—in a secular context where people are unchurching—you are going to be preaching from the first table of the law. You are going to be teaching about idolatry. That is what Paul does in Lystra. That is what he does in Athens. You are going to challenge what people worship instead of God, whatever that is. In our culture, in any situation with any individual to whom you are speaking, in any context in which you are preaching or teaching, you need to discern what the fundamental barrier between people and God is. What are they worshipping instead of God? What is their idol? In our culture, the greatest idol for almost everyone is the worship of one's self. It is the demand for personal freedom, the demand to have authority over my own life, to do what I want, to pursue happiness for myself in the way that I want to. Our culture regards it as an absolute right, the right to pursue happiness in the way that "I" define it. If we do not challenge that idol in this culture, we cannot preach the Gospel. Luther put it this way: "I can preach the Gospel with the clearest voice and in the loudest way, but if I fail to preach it at the point where it is currently under attack, I have not preached it at all." That is Luther. In his day, it meant if he did not address the issue of justification through faith alone, he was not preaching the Gospel because that was the fundamental problem for the medieval church. In our day, the deepest-held belief of our contemporaries is that I control my own life and I have the right to do what I want to do. Ninety eight percent of our contemporaries say they believe that. Most Christians conclude that I am sovereign over my own life; I have the right to live my life the way I want and to pursue my happiness in the way I define it. That is the fundamental obstacle between

people and God in our culture. If we do not challenge that we are not going to challenge people; we are not going to preach the Gospel faithfully.

In Athens, Paul had to challenge their idolatry, their inadequate notions of God, and their idolatrous worship. In our day, we have to challenge people's idolatry, their completely inadequate notions of God, and their desire to turn God into somebody who serves their purposes. You hear a lot of this in the churches as well: health, wealth, and happiness. That is their gospel, defined for the moment in which we live. You can have what you want, name it and claim it. It is not a biblical Gospel, rather it is a gospel designed for a culture that says I can have my life the way I want it. Just have faith; you will be healthy, wealthy, and get everything you want. It is nonsense biblically; it is a heresy because it is shaped by the idolatry of the culture in which we live. That is what it is at its heart. We are going to turn God into a means of getting what we want, of having our own happiness. It is not mildly wrong; it is horribly wrong. It is not the Gospel of Christ. And that idol, that false worship, is the issue that you have to challenge if you do not challenge anything else. People have many other idols, the idols of work, sexual satisfaction, money, materialism, and personal comfort. They all revolve around living for my own happiness, defining my life for myself, doing what I want to do. That has to be challenged, and we have to speak to that just like Paul spoke to the idolatry of the Athenians.

Paul gave very different messages. He preached the law in both situations. But to the Athenians he preached the table of the law against idolatry. Despite the differences of these messages, I want to argue for you that the same basic principles govern Paul's presentation in all these different contexts. What underlies all of Paul's communication of the Gospel in any setting is his commitment to be all things to all people. We already looked at the passage in 1 Corinthians 9, but let us look at it again. This governed Paul and it governs us in every situation in which we go to serve. Wherever God calls you when you graduate from seminary or wherever he is calling you now, you are called to be "all things to all people." First Corinthians 9:19 says, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews [...] To the weak I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so by all possible means I might save some." That is your calling to whomever you are reaching out to—to become like them, to get alongside them. Never disobey God's commandments, never forsake your worship of God alone, but be all things to all people. That is Paul's fundamental commitment.

The other way we might express this is to say that Paul seeks to follow the example of Christ. In fact, that is how Paul understood his ministry. In 1 Corinthians 4:16 he says, "I urge you to imitate me." And in 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." What Paul seeks to do is to imitate Christ, to live by the mind of Christ. In Philippians 2:2 Paul urges us to have the mind of Christ, to be like-minded, "[have] the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." And then he speaks beautifully about Christ as a servant. That is your calling as an evangelist or as an apologist. Live by the mind of Christ and be a servant of those to whom you go. That is your calling: be prepared to get alongside them, think more highly of them than you think of yourself, and look not just to your own interests but look to theirs. That is at the very heart of all evangelism because that is what Christ did in order to come and redeem us. He came from heaven. He did not consider His equality with God a thing to be held onto, but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. Your calling is to go and be with people and be like them, not like them in sin, but to really get alongside them. You are to share their life and so communicate to them because you love them, because you desire to serve them, and because you know them. So that is the most fundamental thing that is governing all that Paul does. Among people of

whatever race, culture, or religious background, Paul's desire was to serve them. He would shape his message to fit the understanding of his hearers, and he would fit his own pattern of living to their pattern of life. When he was with the Jews, he had Jewish food. He was kosher. When he was not with the Jews, he happily ate Gentile food. Paul adopted their pattern of life but did not disobey God, for He said he is always under law to Christ.

The message at its heart is always the same. It is the message that God has given. It is a biblical message, but it will be presented in all sorts of different ways. We see this in the Gospels themselves. If you look at the ministry of Christ, He is our perfect example here. He is the one from whom Paul learned his lessons. When you read the Gospels, you see Jesus talking to a great variety of people: Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, wealthy, poor, healthy, sick, men, women, Pharisees, Sadducees, tax collectors, teachers, fishermen, soldiers, prostitutes, and farmers. Jesus talks to all sorts of people, and He goes as a servant to each one of them to address them in a way that is going to communicate to them and get alongside them. Jesus is all things to all people. Among the Pharisees and teachers of the law, Jesus shows Himself to be a master of theological discussion. When He is talking to country people, farmers, fishermen, and homemakers in rural Palestine and Galilee, Jesus uses stories from everyday life to communicate to them. Our calling is to be all things to all people.

What we are going to be doing over these next couple of sessions is looking at a series of principles that govern all that Paul has to say in these three messages and everywhere else where he speaks. The first principle is the principle of respect. Let us look first at Paul's address to the Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue. We probably do not even notice how respectfully he speaks because we are so familiar with this kind of message. But he begins by saying, "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God." Again in Acts 13:26 he says, "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles..." Paul addresses these people as his brothers. He shows respect for them. He loved his fellow Jews very deeply because he was a Jew himself. He says he would have died for them. He would have gone to hell for them. He speaks to them respectfully.

The same is true when we come to look at Paul in Athens as he speaks to the Athenian philosophers. He begins his message in Acts 17:22 with "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription..." Now, what is fascinating about this is earlier in Acts 17:16 it says, "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was filled with idols." The word there is very strong. He is really disturbed in his spirit. He is shocked by the idolatry of Athens, by these temples and statues and the kind of worship that was taking place in them. He is deeply troubled in spirit by what he sees. Despite that, he addresses the Athenians respectfully. He is not flattering them nor is he being sarcastic. He says, "You are very religious." People can use that term sarcastically today, but Paul did not. Flattery was forbidden for those addressing the Areopagus. Paul is not flattering anybody. He is simply speaking respectfully because he really honors these people. We find this same pattern all the way through. Look at Paul addressing people in Acts 22:1, for example. Paul is on trial and says, "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense." Or in Acts 26:2, Paul's address to King Agrippa, it says, "Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 'King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.'" Paul addresses Agrippa respectfully and not just because he is on trial and he wants a good outcome of the trial. It is not just because the man is a king either, but because this is his commitment.

One other example we should notice here is in Acts 19, the account of the riot in Ephesus. It is really fascinating. In the city of Ephesus so many people have been converted and influenced by Christianity and Paul's message that people have begun to give up on their idolatry. There is a silversmith named Demetrius who makes shrines of Artemus, models of the temple of Diana. The temple of Diana was in the city of Ephesus. It is one of the most beautiful buildings of the ancient world. It is one of the seven wonders in the ancient world. People came from all over the Greek and Roman Empire and far beyond its borders to see the temple of Diana. It is similar to how people go to the Eiffel Tower today in Paris and come away with a postcard of it or a little Eiffel Tower. Well, people would buy little shrines of Artemus. Many of them were pagans who worshipped at the temple. A lot of people made their living off of this wonder and great attraction because those who went to worship there bought the little shrines. So what did Demetrius say? Acts 19:25 says, "You know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemus will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

This speech by the silversmith causes a vast riot that goes on for hours. The people go to public place and they are shouting for two hours, "Great is Artemus of the Ephesians! Great is Diana." They are really riled up by this speech that her name and their names are going to be discredited. What is fascinating about this account, and there are many things that are fascinating, is how it stopped. If you look down at verses 34 and 35, they kept shouting in unison for two hours: "Great is Artemus of the Ephesians! The city clerk quieted the crowd and said, 'Men of Ephesus, does not all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemus and of her image, which fell from heaven?'" He is referring to a meteorite that had fallen in the area around Ephesus which had a vaguely female shape. The meteorite was put on a pedestal and worshipped as an image of the goddess Diana. Then he says, "Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here,"—this is what I want you to notice —"though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess." Paul could not be accused of blaspheming the goddess Artemus—Diana. Despite the appalling idolatry of her worship and the fact that in the temple of Diana and other temples, even human sacrifices were carried out, Paul did not blaspheme Diana.

It is not necessary to pour scorn on what other people believe and what they worship, even if it is false and even if it greatly disturbs your spirit. It ought to disturb your spirit whenever you see idolatry and false worship. It ought to trouble you deeply, but you are still called to speak respectfully about and to people. This is really important. Let me give you one example. Because I teach apologetics, I get letters from people who are evangelists and apologists. I got a letter from a guy who prides himself as an evangelist to Muslims. He goes to campuses around the States, but there is always a riot and he has to be escorted off the campus by the police. The reason is because he violently attacks Mohammed and the worship of Allah. Basically, he blasphemes Allah. He thinks that is being a good evangelist, having a good testimony. But Paul did not blaspheme Diana. Paul spoke to people with respect.