

## **First Century, Continued**

Last time we started by talking about the Great Commission. Turn back to Matthew 28, and we can talk about it a bit more. This is a very familiar passage, but there is more to it in terms of its importance for Matthew. Matthew had a pool of resurrection appearances of Jesus from which he could speak about. The fact that he chose to end on this one is evidence of some emphases and motifs in the book of Matthew itself. That is the approach we are taking to Matthew.

Matthew 28:16-20 says, “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” Last time I reminded you of our discussion of worship, and we also talked about the nature of doubt in Matthew.

We also spoke about the phrase “all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” I noted that this is the highest claim of authority in the book of Matthew. There is an escalation leading up to it. The nature of this authority evidences a direct claim to deity. The people, too, interpreted Jesus’ statement about the Son of Man appearing on the right hand of God the Father Almighty as a claim to deity, and thus they accused Him of blasphemy. If it was right for them to do that then it was all the more right to see this claim to “all authority” as being a claim to deity. Should they have any doubt of that in Matthew, there is a striking way that He says to baptize in verse 19: “Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” He uses the singular word “name” there followed by the Trinitarian name. It is a direct claim to deity on the part of the Son because He claims to have the very same name as the Father and as the Holy Spirit. This is the kind of authority that Jesus is claiming here. Of course we recognize that He has that authority. It is in light of that authority that He gives the following command, “Go therefore.” “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...’”

This is where I want to give you a little bit of the Greek background. There are four verbs there: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. If you study the Greek, three of them are participles, and only one is an actual imperative. Literally you have the participle “going,” the main idea “to make disciples,” and two other participles, “baptizing” and “teaching.” It is not the case in English that we would normally say, “Going make disciples.” So it is not possible to translate it literally from Greek into English. That is why your English translations inevitably translate it as “go” instead of “going” as if it is an imperative. It is not an imperative in Greek, though. That is not sufficient in terms of the import of the verbs. Greek participles have a variety of different uses. Therefore there are several options in terms of determining what is meant by the participles in one place or another.

First, note that the “going” precedes “make disciples.” The “baptizing” and “teaching” follow. In my mind, that implies that the use of the “going” participle may be different from the use of the other two participles. But the use of the “baptizing” and “teaching” participles is probably the same. One possibility with a Greek participle is that, around an imperative and especially after an imperative, a participle can take on the flavor of the imperative or command. So this could be “go,” like an

imperative. Likewise, it could be “baptize” and “teach,” like commands. There are English translations that do that with all three; almost every English translation that I know does it with the first one.

However, there is another use of the word for “going.” It would set up the temporal context for the main verb, which is the imperative “make disciples.” The temporal context would be like “when you go” or “as you go.” That is another option for “going.” When we come to “baptizing” and “teaching,” it is less likely that Matthew is setting up the temporal context for making disciples, but there are a couple of other possibilities. We do this in English. I might say, “I open the hatch, letting the water flow out.” There is an implicit connection between “letting the water out” and “open the hatch.” The phrase “in order to” is implied there; letting the water out is the purpose or result of opening the hatch. The last two imperatives of Jesus’ command could be for a purpose or result “in order to baptize” and “in order to teach.” That is one option.

Another way of handling a participle in English and Greek is to say, “I taught them many things, reading the Bible and studying it thoroughly.” “Reading” and “studying” are the participles, and “I taught” is the main verb. Grammarians speak of the connection between “I taught” and “reading and studying” as instrumentality. It is like you said, “I taught them many things by reading and by studying.” Another option for “baptizing” is “by baptizing” and “by teaching.” So “baptizing” could mean “in order to baptize” or “by baptizing,” and “teaching” could mean “in order to teach” and “by teaching.” “Going” could mean “go” or “as you go.”

I am not going to leave you with a bunch of options, though. I think this passage has a direction in which it is heading. I encourage you to read commentaries to see the degree to which you would agree and the arguments that the commentators employ. I know most of you do not know Greek, and that is fine. You might ask how you would enter into this discussion, and you probably have to be dependent on someone else to take you into it. That means you need to read a commentary. When I suggest that you read a commentary, you should not read just one. You should read two or three to get a variety of opinions and to see the kind of arguments that are employed.

Let me give you a commentary on this verse, and you can test it with some others. Here are my thoughts. First of all, we can definitely say the most important verb in this passage is “make disciples.” There is no question about that. The question after that is how these participles relate. I want to take them separately because “going” precedes “baptizing” and “teaching,” which are after the main verb.

Let us look at “going” first. This is where you need to know a little bit about Greek grammar and have some software that lets you do a very helpful search. We are looking at the style of Matthew. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and He probably did not phrase things using participles. This is good Greek. Jesus probably said it slightly differently in Aramaic. Matthew brings into Greek the intent of Jesus and what He said. We are interested in Matthew’s Greek because Matthew is helping us get into and interpret what Jesus said for us. In Matthew you can search for a participle preceding an imperative within a few words of one another. You can see what generally happens with a participle that precedes an imperative. There are actually a number of phrases that are like this in Matthew. Matthew 2:8 says, “And he [Herod] sent them [the magi] to Bethlehem and said, ‘Going, make a careful search for the child.’” We would say, “Go and make a careful search for the child.” If you listen to that, you can tell that Herod really wants them to make a careful search. First they have to get up and go in order to make a careful search. They are standing in his royal hall, and he says, “Go. Make a careful search.” That is his point. Later in chapter 2 an angel speaks to Joseph in a dream. He uses the word “arise” instead of the word “go.” Joseph is in a dream and is lying down. The angel says, “Arising, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt.” We would say, “Arise. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt.” The crucial bit is to

not just get up. If Joseph had just gotten up, he would not have accomplished everything. The important part is to take the child and flee to Egypt. The “arising” is just the motion that he has to do in order to start the command. You are lying down; get up! Flee to Egypt!

Another example of a participle that precedes an imperative is in Matthew 5:24. If your brother has something against you, you are supposed to leave your offering at the altar, go your way, and be reconciled to your brother. Then it says, “Coming, present your offering.” The important verb there is “present your offering.” The coming is just the necessary antecedent motion. It is what you have to do to get to the part that really matters. He is saying to go do all these things, then come back and present your offering.

There are multiple other examples of this. One of the interesting ones is in Matthew 10:7-8. This is another circumstance where Jesus is commissioning His disciples. It says, “Going, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.” The most important thing there is to preach. The going is the necessary antecedent motion to get there in order to be able to preach to the people who need to hear. You have to go to the sick in order to be able to preach to them and heal them.

I have a number of other examples, and they all basically work like this. In other words, every example that I can find in Matthew of a participle preceding an imperative, the participle is a participle of motion. It is just the necessary antecedent motion to accomplishing the main thing. That being the case, “go” in the Great Commission does not mean “as you go,” because it does not state the temporal circumstances of going. Rather, it is as if Jesus is looking at the disciples who are worshiping Him, and they look up and Jesus basically says, “Get up! Make disciples.” He says, “Go, make disciples.” The emphasis in the passage is not on going, but it is on making disciples. You just have to go in order to get there. Obviously, if the 11 disciples of Jesus are up on a mountain and Jesus comes and says, “Make disciples,” they might look around at each other and wonder what He meant. They thought they already were disciples. So Jesus is telling them to get up, find some other people, and make disciples.

This might be different from what you have heard at a missions conference. The missions conference slogans are usually “Go therefore and make disciples” or “Go and make disciples,” or if you only want one word the banner might say, “Go!” But that is the wrong word. The important phrase in this context is “make disciples.” By saying that, I am not saying that the Great Commission is not about missions. It is about missions, but not because of the word “go.” It is about missions because of the words “all the nations.” The verse says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” You have to go to the nations in order to make disciples of them. I recognize that, but the word “go” is still not the focus.

The reason that is important is because our mandate is not simply to go. Our mandate is to make disciples. The question is how to make disciples. The next natural question would be how in the world do we make disciples? Let us look at the other two participles. Let us start with “teaching.”

I mentioned that there are at least three different ways you could translate this participle. It could be the command “teach,” partaking of the flavor of the main imperative and continuing it down. Another option is that it could provide the purpose or result, “in order to teach.” Last, it could be the means by which one accomplishes the task of making disciples, “by teaching.” If you were to try to define discipleship in Matthew, you would look at who made disciples in Matthew. Jesus made disciples, and He did it by teaching them. The means of making disciples for Jesus was by teaching them. I would suggest that the best way to understand the participles that come after “make disciples” is to do it “by baptizing” and “by teaching.” Get up! Make disciples! Do it by baptizing them into the Trinitarian name

of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and you do teach them to observe everything that I have commanded you.

Let us unpack that for a minute. To baptize in the Trinitarian name implies baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At this stage in Jesus' ministry, He is crucified and resurrected. There is good news that His life would be a ransom for many and that the Lord's Supper has been accomplished. Jesus has inaugurated a new covenant by His blood, which is good for the remission of sins. That is the name by which we baptize people. The Trinitarian God has issued forth in the salvation of all of mankind by offering forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. Forgiveness in the blood of Jesus is especially in the baptizing. The teaching is to observe "everything which I have commanded you." In the book of Matthew, Jesus has commanded us the whole book. Fundamentally, when you get to the Great Commission, you are supposed to understand that we have to get up and make disciples. It is not just one people group, but it is all the nations. This is in keeping with Abraham in Matthew 1. We do this by baptizing and teaching. There might be other things involved, but those are the fundamentals that are highlighted here. We teach them to observe everything that is commanded. We know the contents of what we need to teach because at the end of Matthew you get to the command, "make disciples," and you are immediately beckoned back to chapter 1 and read through the whole thing again and again. You are called to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. That is perhaps what the book of Matthew is about. It is about what it means to be a disciple so we know how to go about making disciples. That is the Great Commission in terms of its import in the context of Matthew. Of course Jesus promises us in that context that His authority, which He has and is effectively dispensing to His people, is vouchsafed by His presence where He says, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The reason we emphasize "go" is because you cannot say in English, "Going, make disciples." You cannot translate the participle. The translators are left trying to come up with a way to translate this correctly. As I suggested, I do not think "as you go" is the best way to translate it. It is the necessary antecedent motion to "make disciples," so you do say "go." But the problem is that as soon as you translate it that way into English, we tend to emphasize whatever comes first in a string of imperatives. In this case we emphasize "go." The other part of it is that in the last 200 years, evangelicalism has woken up to the sense of needing to be about missions. This is true, but I would locate that in "all nations," not in "go." The danger is that we can make missions about going. We might show up, preach the Gospel to people, see a response, and think we are done and can leave. This passage does not let us do that, though. It tells us that we have to make disciples. We preach the Good News of the Gospel, and when they respond we baptize. But we also have to teach. We dare not conceive of missions or evangelism as simply proclaiming the Gospel and then leaving. It is proclaiming the Gospel and then grounding people in what it means to be a disciple and follower of Jesus. We also need to teach them what it means to be a member of the church.

There is one name for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is true that some denominations emphasize that you baptize in the name of Jesus. In the book of Acts that is what they do; it is shorthand. In Matthew the name to baptize in is the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. I do not want to make too much about this except that if you baptize in the name of Jesus exclusive of the Father and the Spirit, then you are going against the sense of this passage. If someone baptizes in the name of Jesus and they intend by that that Jesus is a member of the Trinity, and this is all about the Trinity, then they are in keeping with the focus of this passage. Therefore the baptizing in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts is in keeping with the spirit of this passage. But if you make such a big deal of it that you baptize in the name of Jesus as if that is something separate from the name of the Father or the Holy Spirit, then you are in danger of breaking the backbone of the Trinity. There is danger that you are pitting Jesus against

the Father and the Holy Spirit. To the extent that some denominations have gone almost that far, then I would have concerns for their Christology and their view of God and the Trinity.

Let us pray, and we can get back to our discussion of backgrounds.

*Father, we as Your people, when we approach this passage, are humbled by the great privilege and the huge responsibility that You have given to Your people. Our very Lord has come down and commissioned the church to be about making disciples. Father, individually and corporately, we so often fall down in this regard. Enable us, first of all, to be good and proper followers of Christ, to be disciples ourselves. We desire to be those who truly worship Him and do not doubt. Enable us also to see the nations around us, be they next door, down the city street, or across the world. Enable us to recognize the great need that they, too, have for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Give us the ability, wisdom, and fire in our bellies to accomplish this commission for the glory of our Lord. In His name we pray. Amen.*

My goal in this lesson is to finish our discussion of backgrounds in general and look specifically at backgrounds revolving around the crucifixion of Jesus. One of the things we are going to emphasize throughout this course is the way that the different New Testament authors treat the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. In order to understand that we also need to understand what crucifixion was like in the first century.

Last time we ended by talking about the different keys to understanding social class among the Romans and the Mediterranean world in the first century. I was trying to convey that class in the ancient Roman world was not just about how much money you had. That was important, especially after you were shown to be a freed person, a free person, or even better, a citizen. Then when you get to the issues of patricians, plebeians, senators, and equities it is all about money. How much money you had was important, but it was not the only issue of importance. Your heritage was important because you were born into a situation. You might be born a slave, in which case you were categorized as a slave. You might be born free, in which case you were categorized as free. You could sell yourself into slavery, in which case you would move to a different social class in the hopes that eventually you would be freed and become a freed person. Then you could become a client of your patron, who was your former slaveholder. Though you were initially free, that ultimate position as a freed person might be of greater economic means and provide more social connections. Therefore you would effectively be at a higher social class. There are a lot of dimensions going on in terms of how people understood their place in society in the first century. In addition, it mattered whether you were a Roman citizen or not. You could be born into the position of the Roman citizen, or you could be declared by imperial command to be a citizen. As soon as you were declared a citizen, a whole set of different laws applied to you. You were much better off. Those are some of the issues of the social classes among the Romans.

The citizenship of Paul was significant in Acts. That is what saved him from some very harsh penalties. Paul directly addresses the issue of slavery in Ephesians and Colossians, and Peter does the same. In doing so they are probably assuming, not just slavery broadly, but a very specific kind of slavery. They were writing primarily to cities, so they were probably referring to household slaves. These were people who cooked, took accounts, cleaned, and looked after the education of the children. Those slaves had a much better social position than the slaves in the mines. If you sold yourself into slavery, you would sell yourself to a particular individual. Once you sold yourself to that individual they could do with you what they wanted. You would set it up ahead of time to determine in what sense they anticipated making you a slave. Generally you would not sell yourself to go to the mines, but you would sell yourself to go to a house.

The shops in Ephesus might have been the result of being a client. There are a variety of ways that someone could be a shop holder. If you had enough money already you could go out and buy yourself a shop. If your parents already owned a shop, you may eventually take over their shop. Another way to become a shop owner is if you are a slave and you become a freed person. Your patron might set you up in a shop. You do not necessarily have to become their slave in order to become their client.

For those born into slavery, the seven-year time period before becoming a freed person was not a guarantee. It was depended on the master more often than not. Some masters were more willing to free people than others. Pliny the Younger, who was a Roman author, boasts of his willingness to free his own slaves. He felt like that was a better way to live. So it depended more on the master than whether there was a specific societal-wide standard. I do not know if you would lose your citizenship if you sold yourself into slavery. I am unclear on whether or not citizens typically sold themselves into slavery. If you were a freed person and had children they would also be considered free. That is another reason you might sell yourself into slavery. You are not just looking out for your own self-interest but ultimately for the interests of your children as well. By selling yourself into slavery you could associate yourself with the house of someone who was much wealthier and had a much better social standing. They could help get you set up in society as well.

The context of that is applicable in 1 Corinthians 7:20-23. It says, "Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so." Paul is not calling for slaves to be manumitted or for them to rebel. That is what would happen if they all insisted on being free. If their slave owners offered them freedom, Paul encouraged them to take it. The verse goes on, "For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman." If you are a slave, in Paul's mind, your class or citizenship is no longer earthly but heavenly. Even though you are a slave on earth, in Christ's mind you have been freed by Him. You are His freedman. "Similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave." Paul calls himself a slave at the beginning of Romans. In Romans 6 he uses the imagery of being changed from slaves to sin to slaves to Christ. The Christian is no longer possessed by sin but is now possessed by Christ. His point is that everyone who is truly a Christian is now possessed by Christ. First Corinthians 7:23 continues, "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." Today we view that metaphorically as a command not to be too submissive to someone else. But that is not what Paul is talking about. In his context, free people could sell themselves into slavery, and he is saying not to do that. The rationale for that appears to be that even though you are of Christ, you are the possession of the master. The master can force you to do things that you as a Christian should not want to do. So you should not seek that situation, but if you find yourself in that situation, realize that you are free in the Lord.

Some have asked if we should see slavery as another kind of work. If not, why is slavery permitted in the Bible? We often view slavery in light of our own history of slavery, which is horrible. We would all recognize that the American history of slavery is abominable. There are points of continuity and discontinuity between American slavery and slavery in the first-century world. Ancient slavery could be a lot better than we often conceive of American slavery. But it could also be equally as bad if not worse, depending on the situation of the slave. It seems that because the epistles are written to cities and are primarily addressing household slaves they tend to address people who are on the upper end of slavery. They are better off than many of the slaves that we think of when we watch *Roots* or any of the many stories of slavery that have come out.

Second, slavery is not equivalent to work. There are household codes in Ephesians. The first section addresses husbands and wives, the next one addresses children and their parents, and the last one addresses masters and slaves. It is too often the case that when people get to the section on masters and slaves, they immediately apply it to their work situations. Thankfully most of us are not in a situation in which the person who employs us owns us. They do not really physically own us so that we cannot get out of it without constituting an actual slave revolt and meriting death from the governing powers. That is what it merited in the ancient world if you tried to get out of slavery. The situation is not wholly analogous. There are some similarities, and there might be some principles that should be brought into the workplace, but it is not a direct analogy. You have to be very careful in applying those to people's work situations.

Finally, slavery in the Bible seems to generally be permitted, not encouraged. God does not ever say that slavery is okay. He simply acknowledges it as a social form that is practiced during the time of the Old and New Testaments. He seeks, through His people (Moses and Paul), to curtail the excesses of slavery on the part of the masters. He also tries to encourage a right perception of what it means to be a slave on the part of the slaves. The social category is assumed. It is not a creation category. Some people want to draw analogies between slavery and other social practices. Some people say it was good that we did away with slavery, and now we need to do away with other social stigmas such as homosexuality. But the relationship between men and women is a creational ordinance. God designed people to be male and female. Therefore the relationships between men and women and the sexual relationships are determined by the nature of creation. Slavery is not a creation ordinance, though, so you cannot draw the same analogy. Many people do that in ethics in our society today. There is a book on slavery in the Bible written by Murray Harris that may be interesting to look at. He is a very capable New Testament exegete. It will stretch you in terms of your reading, but it is worth reading.

Let us move on and quickly identify the major philosophical movements in the first century. Philosophy in the first century was much more powerful in terms of its educational import than philosophy is today. Today the word "philosophy" is left for the one department in a university. It is those classes that you want to avoid for the most part because you know they are going to be esoteric. There are a few people who engage in the reading of philosophers just for fun, but we all know that they are pretty crazy! That is how we perceive of philosophy. If someone asked you where you got your understanding of the nature of the fabric of the universe and who or where it came from, your answer would probably be the Bible. Someone who did not have a Bible in front of them would answer that they get these things from science. I would say we probably need to integrate the two, but that is a different matter. If you were asked where to get answers as to how you should live, as Christians you go to the Bible. You read the teachings of Jesus and the Law of the Old Testament to get a sense of what it means to live well and rightly. In the ancient world they did not go to the scientists to get the answers to these questions. The scientists were mostly philosophers. And they certainly did not go to religion. Just think about the ancient pagan myths of Zeus. As soon as Zeus is given an opportunity, he takes on a mortal body, finds some "hot chick," and goes off and has a child. That is definitely the sense you should get as you read about Zeus. The guy does not know how to control himself. If you look at the rest of the stories of the deities, male or female, they are not much better than Zeus. So in the ancient world, people did not look to these deities as a source of their morality. In the ancient world people looked to the philosopher as their moral guide. The philosopher in the ancient world primarily told you what the universe was, its metaphysics, and what it meant to live rightly, your ethics. Philosophers had a lot greater control in the ancient world than we think of philosophers today. This helps us understand the New Testament because in Acts 17 Paul shows up in Athens and converses with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. They are specifically labeled in the text. You probably do not know what Stoicism is, and you probably have the wrong idea of what Epicureanism is. Therefore you misinterpret what is going on in that context.

Let me describe Platonism, even though it gets into esoteric reality. For instance, you are sitting in a chair. I am going to sit too, but I am sitting on a table. How do you know that, though? What constitutes a chair? You could say that four legs and a back make a chair. This has four legs, but it does not have a back. So maybe this is a bench. But this is not a bench; it is a table. What constitutes a chair? That is the kind of thing that Plato talked about a lot. That is also one of the reasons why people today avoid philosophy classes in universities. He was basically saying that we have a mental construct of what constitutes a chair, therefore we are able to identify whether someone is in a chair or not. For him it is more than just a mental construct. The idea of “chairness” is above and beyond me. I learn what a chair is, but the idea of “chair” preexists me. Plato talks about it in those terms. It is not so important with chairs, but you might get to more important concepts such as beauty and good. What constitutes good ethics, good living, or goodness in anything? Then we realize that goodness is something that things just partake of. This is a chair, but it is only a concrete expression of what true “chairness” is. What is real for Plato is not so much the actual chair, but it is the notion or form of a chair. That sounds very odd, I know. That is what Plato thought about. As soon as I bring in the idea of the good and tell you it has ethical implications, he has woven together a metaphysical explanation. Material reality is only a vague expression or shadow of the real stuff, which is the forms. That is Plato’s metaphysics, but it has ethical implications. In order to understand what good ethics is, you first have to understand what “good” is. Of the four philosophies, that is the most obtuse. I would encourage you to do some reading about this because it is important in terms of understanding how some first-century people thought.

The most important philosophies in the New Testament and probably in the Roman world at this time were the philosophies of the Stoics and the Epicureans. The Stoics believed that the world as we have it is made out of a substance. The less pure manifestation of that substance is the physical reality that is around us. The purest manifestation of that substance is reason itself. Rationality permeates the whole universe. There are physical manifestations of that that only approximate the real reality, which is reason. They called reason *logos* or “the word.” The beginning of John 1 says, “In the beginning was the Word.” The Greek word there is *logos*, and some people have too quickly said John was picking up on a Stoic notion. I think he has a much more complex origin to that, though. If reason permeates the world that is around us, then the world in all of its silliness and the fate that determines the world is all moving in a rational direction, whether we perceive it correctly or not. That is the metaphysics, but we need to talk about the ethics. This means you should live in keeping with reason. To the degree that you are keeping in step with reason, you are keeping in step with the ultimate substance of the universe around you. The good life is the rational life for the Stoics. This has some implications. One of the more famous ones is that emotions can get in the way of reason. If you get too excited you stop thinking. The Stoics were very suspicious of emotions. They said instead we should focus on our reason and rationality. If you speak of someone as being Stoic, you are saying they are not very emotional. That is one ramification of Stoicism, but the Stoic belief was really to keep in step with reason. Reason dictated what constituted good ethics and good living. The most important thing in life for the Stoics was reason. That was in keeping with the idea of philosophy itself in the ancient world, but it was all the more manifest among the Stoics.

Let us talk about Epicureans for a minute. They also had a metaphysic as to what constituted the world. For them the world was made of little packages of matter called atoms. That is where we get our word “atoms.” These packages of matter bounce into each other and glob up together. They manifest themselves in bigger things such as chairs, desks, and human bodies. They argue that you can see this happening because things decay over time and parts seem to disappear by little pieces of matter that you cannot perceive falling off. They argue that there was physical observation involved in coming up with the idea of atoms being material. That means that you and I are just a bundle of atoms. Most of the

pagan world had some concept of life after death. They did not talk about life in material bodies, but it was usually a very ephemeral idea. The Epicureans said that when you die you just decay away and your atoms disappear. You are no more. It was not something to fear because you will not be in any pain once you die. You do not need to worry about it. It also means you only have a few decades in this life, so you need to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This is probably where you misperceive the Epicureans. To be an Epicurean today is to be someone who indulges in sensual pleasure, like really good food. An Epicurean shop sells really good kitchen gear. Life is all about cooking and sensuality. That is not what the ancient Epicurean would say, though. Good food is not bad, so you can enjoy it. But they say that friendships, relatedness to other people, and living an ethical life that you can be proud of at the end are what maximize pleasure. They had a much better notion of pleasure than you probably think they did. It is striking that the Epicureans were very twenty-first century in many ways. The average person that you encounter in your day-to-day life would say that they will disappear when they die. They will not worry about it but live life to the fullest. That is very Epicurean in many ways.

When Paul encountered the Stoics and Epicureans, he did something to really upset them at the end of Acts 17. It was not that he was teaching about a very interesting philosophy, though they thought he was odd. When he talked about the resurrection, that is what set them off. For the Epicureans that meant there was life after death, and they did not believe in that. The Stoics did not really care about the body because they were more interested in the reason. The whole notion of resurrection really jumbled with their categories.

The Cynics are important for us to study because some people called Jesus a Mediterranean Cynic. A Cynic was a person who engaged in social critique. They were very poor and were mendicant traveling philosophers. That meant they looked at the world around them and the way society constructed itself, and they saw it as very false and very illusional. For instance, we dress up in fine clothes and behave very civilly to one another. But deep down there is something else about us that we really need to get in touch with. They pointed out that we are really interested in our own pleasures. What really matters in life is virtue. They defined virtue as acting well but as being well inside and thinking virtuous thoughts. It is living in the virtue of wisdom. You could be virtuous regardless of whether you were poor or rich. You could be virtuous almost apart from human society. The way that you are forced into a certain mold by society is what inhibits your virtue. Therefore the Cynics did various things to challenge society. They railed against it publicly, visibly, and audibly. They did things that were shocking to show that all the fancy clothes and other things inhibit who we are as people. For instance, they would defecate in public. They might go to the city center and show the world what it really means to be human. They would travel around with a staff, a bag, a long beard, and a philosopher's cloak. That is all they would have. They would go from town to town until someone would take care of them. You can see some analogues there with Jesus. He critiqued society. He wandered around without a lot of money. You can also see some significant distinctions between the Cynics and what Jesus was trying to do. He was not just about virtue as an internal state, and He was not even just about right living. He was about going to the cross, dying, and being resurrected on our behalf for the remission of sins. He was also about teaching people to live rightly in community with one another. He did not do some of those shocking things in public.

Some of these different philosophical categories, especially Platonism and Stoicism, had a good deal of influence on the early church and later writers as well. C. S. Lewis is very Platonic in his way of describing heaven. Let us talk about our response to that for a minute. There is an evangelical purist reaction that says that, to the extent that those philosophies were incorporated into Christianity, we need to rip them out. That seems like an overreaction, though. The church rightly understood that God graciously gives wise and worthy thoughts to even the most pagan of people. When you watch a movie

for the sake of discussion, you should not say that it is good or bad. You should talk about what is Christian about the movie and what is not Christian about the movie. That is the way we should approach philosophy as well. We should determine what is right and Christian about it and what is not. It is true that philosophical categories can overtake our systematic theology. As soon as you are doing systematic theology, you systemize. That means you incorporate the understanding of Scripture with a philosophical perspective that allows you to create a system. That can be very good, but it can also be a problem if you choose the wrong system to bring it all together. I would encourage caution, but do not throw out the good with the bad.

Let us talk about religion in the ancient world. There are many categories of religion in the ancient world. The first thing that might come to our mind is Zeus, but there were at least four different categories of religion in the ancient world. There were household gods. If you and I were good Roman citizens, we would have a little place where we put our household deities right as we came in the door of our house or apartment. These are little idols that represent to us the particular deities that we worship. These may not be big deities like Zeus, rather they may be a much smaller deity. In addition to the household gods is the pantheon. These are the big deities, and the ones that you know about. These are the ones that the planets are named after. The Greek god is Zeus, and the Roman expression of that is Jupiter. The Roman gods are Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, etc. Those are the famous ones, and they had the big temples. In a city, you would not just have one temple to Jupiter or Zeus. You would have many temples to Jupiter, Mars, Diana, and others. All of these would be there, and all of them would be worshiped in the city. The goal is if we worship all the deities, then none of them will get really mad with us. If you have read any Homer, you know that all you have to do is upset one deity and you are in a lot of trouble. You can do everything right with Zeus and Athena, but if Aphrodite is upset with you there is going to be war. You have to make sure that you keep all the deities happy, so you have temples to all of them in your city. There were also things called mystery religions. Typically they came out of the East or Egypt. These were religions that were very private. You had to be inducted into them, and they had certain mysteries that they would convey to you. This included things that they would not tell publicly. It was more than just a secret handshake; it was what the religion was really about. Finally there was emperor worship, which started very shortly after the rise of the emperors. It took on its fullest expression much later, but there were aspects of its expression early on where you worshiped the emperor or previous emperor. When he died he became a god. That was part of your duty to the Roman Empire.

Let me give you a few quick pictures to bring you into these religions. When we think of the pantheon we think of the big temples, such as the Parthenon in Athens. If you look at a map of Corinth there are several big temples and some small temples scattered around. If you toured ancient Corinth with a tour guide, he would point out who all the temples were for. That is what the ancient world was; it was full of temples expressing worship to the pantheon of deities because you had to keep them all happy. These temples could be huge. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, on the same mental scale as the Great Pyramid of Giza, was the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. That comes into the Bible in Acts 19 because in Ephesus people stopped worshiping Artemis, and the silversmiths got really upset. The craftsmen shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The temple was gigantic. Every good pagan temple had a cult deity statue that was in the temple itself. You would be able to look at it and worship it right there. Each deity had its own expressions and functions; they all did something special for you. Asclepius was the god of healing, and there were temple precincts dedicated to Esclepius. If you were sick you would go to the temple of Esclepius to be healed. Most Christians do not recognize that religion was woven through all of life. If you went to the theater they would start with an offering to the god or goddess in whose honor that theatrical play was being conducted. The great games in antiquity were held in the honor of a god or goddess. The Olympic Games were held in honor of Zeus; the Isthmian Games were held in honor of Poseidon. Religion was so much a part of people's lives that pretty much

everything they did had a religious dimension to it. Undoubtedly that made it hard for Christians to live in antiquity. When you enter into your house you would have a little ledge where you would put all your house deities. This would remind you of specific house worship that you engaged in. A lararium contained the *lares*, or house deities, and they would be worshiped there. It was common to have a serpent at the entrance to your house as a protection symbol. Everybody would have their own deities that they worshiped in addition to the big gods. One of the mystery religions that we know a little bit about is the worship of Isis. It is described in a book known as *The Golden Ass*. In the book you get a sense of being inducted into this religious context.

Emperor worship was significant at the end of the first century. In Ephesus, where Paul and John were, there was a temple to Domitian. Probably the book of Revelation is in the context of some of the stuff going on in Ephesus. This temple was gigantic, and it had a cult statue of Domitian in it that was also huge. Domitian had this temple built to honor himself. As a result, the Romans did not like Domitian because it was proper to have people worship the emperor before you. It was proper for Augustus to have Julius Caesar worshiped, so in Ephesus there was a temple to the divine Caesar. But Augustus was not supposed to claim worship for himself. Domitian, Nero, and Gaius Caligula all claimed worship for themselves in the first century and broke protocol. They especially sought to have people worship them in the East where people were much more inclined to it than in the West and in Rome. That is some context of the religions in which people in Jesus' day were found.

Next time we will talk about religious ritual, and we will get to our discussion of crucifixion there. This is taking a little longer than I thought, but hopefully this is helpful background to you as you approach your study of the Bible.