

Acts 080
Misguided Worship
Acts 14:8-15
September 24, 2025
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Good evening. Let us take our Bibles and open them to the Book of Acts 14:8. We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts, The words of Christ in Acts 1:8, probably recorded by Luke our author to give us the outline of the book, where Jesus said,

"And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth [Acts 13-28]" (Acts 1:8).

We finished Acts 1-7, the church's witness in Jerusalem. We finished Acts 8-12, the church's witness in the outer counties of Judea and Samaria. Now we are at the point where the gospel leaves the borders of Israel through Paul's missionary journeys. He is going to take three and a trip to Rome. We are still on the first missionary journey in Acts 13-14.

Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to go from Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). They have a ministry on an island called Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12). They hit the mainland and they have a ministry up in Pisidian Antioch. They leave there and they have a ministry in Iconium, which we covered last time (Acts 14:1-7).

First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14)

- I. Paul and Barnabas' appointment (13:1-3)
- II. Cyprus ministry (13:4-12)
- III. Pisidian Antioch ministry (13:13-25)
- IV. Iconium ministry (14:1-7)
- V. Lystra ministry (14:8-20a)
 - A. Healing (8-10)
 - B. Misidentification (11-13)
 - C. Apostolic reaction (14)
 - D. Apostolic message (15-17)
 - E. Reaction to the message (18-20a)

Now they leave Iconium and they go to a place called Lystra. The Lystra ministry is in Acts 14:8-20. We are going to try to tackle that tonight. Here is your outline for Lystra: There is a healing (Acts 14:8-10), a misidentification (Acts 14:11-13) where the inhabitants of Lystra start to worship the apostles. The apostles do not like it, so they react (Acts 14:14), and they give a message (Acts 14:15-17), which is the first message in the Book of Acts to a Gentile pagan audience.

Everything that we have read thus far in the Book of Acts, going all the way back to Acts 2, the audience has been Jewish. You will see Paul doing something different when he talks to the Gentiles. He does not start with Hebrew Bible because typically when he is talking to these Jewish groups, he quotes a lot of Scripture. He does not do that when he is speaking to pagans or unsaved people.

Because they do not have Hebrew Bible they do not know anything about it. He starts with the Bible that they do have, which is Creation, because God has revealed Himself in two sources: creation and nature. That is a pretty good hint for us in terms of our evangelism, how we evangelize.

The people there will react to the message (Acts 14:18-20). It does not seem like they took it really well because they dragged Paul out of the city and they all think he is dead (Acts 14:19-20). They go back into the city, and Paul dusts himself off and goes right back into Lystra. He says, "I am not finished with my sermon yet." It is a tremendous example of what we call "hypomone" in Greek, which is something that the Holy Spirit tries to build in us—the perseverance under fire or trial.

- V. Lystra Ministry (Acts 14:8-20a)
 - A. Healing (8-10)
 - 1. Candidate (8)
 - 2. Circumstances (9)
 - 3. Healing (10)
 - B. Misidentification (11-13)
 - 1. General (11)
 - 2. Specific (12)
 - 3. Sacrificial response (13)
 - C. Apostolic reaction (14)
 - 1. Greek communication (14a)
 - 2. Rending garments (14b)
 - D. Apostolic message (15-17)
 - 1. Question of deniability (15a)
 - 2. Mere men and servants (15b)
 - 3. Call to repentance (15c)
 - 4. God's attributes (15d-17)
 - a) Living (15d)
 - b) Creator (15e)
 - c) Patient (16)
 - d) Revealer (17a)
 - e) Good (17b)

Let us start here with the healing. We have a candidate (Acts 14:8); the circumstances (Acts 14:9); and then the actual healing (Acts 14:10). This is what gets the ball rolling in Lystra.

"At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked" (Acts 14:8).

Where is Lystra? Lystra is a small rural town off the trade route and population centers. It is not too far from Iconium. This is actually an area where Paul is going to have a lot of problems because he writes about it at the end of his life.

"Persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!" (2 Timothy 3:11).

No matter what he went through, God's hand was always there to help him. That is true with us. No matter what we are going through, God is always there to minister to us. He does not necessarily promise to get us away from persecution or problems. I wish that He did. I prayed that way a lot in my life: "Lord, I do not want to go through this." The Lord says, *"My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

Sometimes you discover God best in the fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had an experience with God in the fire, not out of the fire. That is the kind of thing that Paul went through in these various cities, including Lystra.

It talks there about a man who had no strength in his feet, who had never walked, from his mother's womb. Luke would know something about this, our author. What is Luke's occupation? He is a physician.

"Luke, the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14).

That is why there is so much medical type jargon and things like that in the Book of Acts. That is why the Book of Acts tells us that when Judas committed suicide his body fell off of a ravine and the sharp rocks tore open his body and his intestines gushed out. That is in Acts 1. I read that and I say, "Why do I need to know that?" If you are a doctor, you are into that kind of stuff. When God inspired the Bible, He used these guys' individual personalities. You see that kind of thing coming to the surface here with this healing that is going to take place.

You are going to notice a parallel with the apostle Peter. In Acts 3:1-8, Peter does virtually the same thing: *"Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb—" (Acts 3:1-2),* and there was a healing that took place there.

What you will start to see as you go through the Book of Acts is that a lot of the things that Paul does, he is replicating what Peter already did.

Peter already healed a man lame from birth, and that is what Paul does. This kind of parallel happens all the way through the Book of Acts. I think Luke is trying to demonstrate that Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is just as legitimate as Peter's ministry

to the Jews, to show Theophilus—the recipient of the book, probably someone who was reached by Paul—that just because you are a Gentile does not mean Christianity is not for you, because what Paul does is the same thing that Peter does. Paul's ministry, although he was not one of the original Twelve, is just as authentic as Peter's ministry.

From Peter to Paul	
Peter	Paul
Heals a man lame from birth (3:1-11)	Heals a man lame from birth (14:8-18)
Heals by shadow (5:15-16)	Heals by handkerchief (19:11-12)
Success is a cause of jealousy (5:17)	Success is a cause of jealousy (13:45)
Confronts a sorcerer (8:9-24)	Confronts a sorcerer (13:6-11)
Raises Dorcas (9:36-41)	Raises Eutychus (20:9-12)
Jailed and miraculously freed (12:3-19)	Jailed and miraculously freed (16:25-34)

Next, we have the circumstances:

"This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well" (Acts 14:9).

Paul, as he is ministering here, sees this guy staring at him, this guy that cannot walk, and he sees inside his heart because Paul is an apostle and he had supernatural gifts. He could see that this man had faith to be made well. Not everybody has the faith to be made well, according to the Bible. Over in Mark 6:5-6, is a record of Jesus in his hometown.

"And He [Jesus] could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief" (Mark 6:5-6).

In the ministry of Christ, He ran into people that just did not believe who He was. They did not believe in the power of God, and they remained sick as a result. But this guy here is different; he has faith and he has faith to be made well. Paul, as an apostle recognizes this.

Second Corinthians 12:12 talks about the signs of a true apostle. All of the miracles that happen in the Book of Acts are done by the apostles, or someone that had authority, or an apostle that had authority over somebody. That is why there are so many miracles in the Book of Acts. God is building the church from the ground up. When God starts a

new work, it is typically accompanied by signs and wonders. This is a new work of God; this is the beginning of the Church Age.

"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Jesus is the cornerstone. That is the most important stone in the temple structure; it goes in first. You use that to gauge where every other stone is supposed to go. That is put in and that is Jesus—this is Paul's metaphor of the temple in Ephesians 2, analogizing the church to the temple. Then come the foundation stones, which are the apostles. God is doing something new, and there are signs and wonders that accompany it to authenticate it.

That raises the question: Can we have miracles like this today? Personally, I believe you can, or else I would not pray for people. I think when we pray for people, we are praying for them to get well, but we do not have apostles today where God is doing miracles through an apostle. Now, when God does a miracle—I think they are less frequent—He does it directly rather than indirectly through an apostle, because the apostles are all dead. The foundation of the church was laid 2,000 years ago.

What happens as a result of this whole thing is there is a healing (Acts 14:10).

"[Paul] said with a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And he leaped up and began to walk" (Acts 14:10).

You notice it is not one of these things where, "Okay, go to the doctor and come back and we will see how you do." I watch a lot of these so-called TV evangelists today, and they are into this kind of process healing. "So and so has something wrong on her x-ray." She needs to go back to the doctor three or four times, and then they hold up the x-ray and say, "There is a healing."

That is not what is happening here. This is an instantaneous healing; there is not a long process at all. The exact same thing happened with Peter when he healed in Acts 3:7, the healing that took place earlier in the Book of Acts.

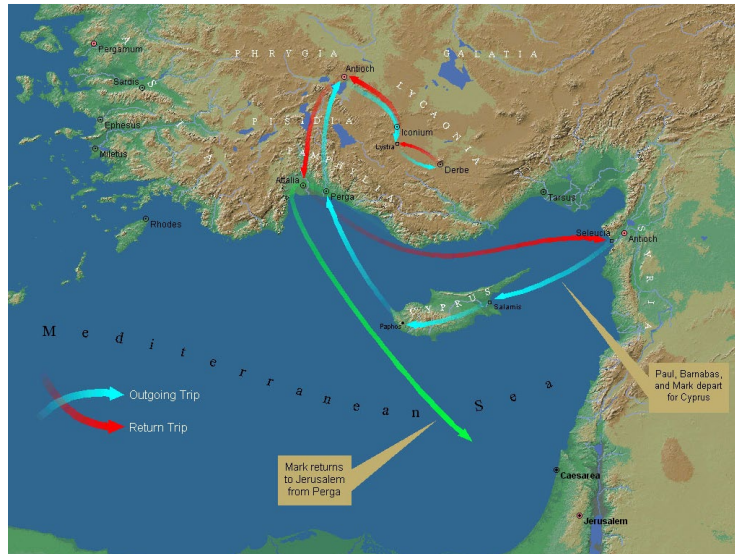
"And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened" (Acts 3:7).

When God does a miracle, God gets the glory. It is done in such a way where man does not get credit. It is obviously a God thing. That is what happens.

They are in Lystra, and there is a healing as Paul and Barnabas have moved from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium to Lystra. This kicks off the Lystra ministry. The unbelievers, the pagans, the Gentiles that had no understanding of the true God, start to worship Paul and Barnabas. That happens in Acts 14:11-13. You see what generally happens:

"When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have become like men and have come down to us'" (Acts 14:11).

What is all this stuff about the Lycaonian language? There is Lystra on the map; that is the city. The general county that this was in is called Lycaonia.



Apparently it had its own language. These people start to worship Paul and Barnabas, and Paul and Barnabas, not being natives to that area, did not really understand what they were doing. What the inhabitants of Lystra were doing had to be explained later on to Paul and Barnabas. That is probably why they did not react against this right away.

Then you see something specific in Acts 14:12:

"And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:12).

We have two guys, Barnabas and Paul. The Roman pagans that are being referred to here are Jupiter and Mercury. The Greeks originally called them Zeus, who was the father, and Hermes, who was the speaker. Zeus was the dad and Hermes was the speaker. Hermes was like a messenger for the dad.

That is where we get the word hermeneutics from—the science and art of biblical interpretation. It comes from this name, Hermes, who was a messenger of the gods. Hermeneutics is understanding what God has said and then declaring it. In a sense, if you are an interpreter and proclaimer of the Bible, you are a messenger, not of the gods plural, but of God. That is where hermeneutics gets its name. You might wonder why we call the science and art of biblical interpretation hermeneutics. It comes from Hermes.

You have Barnabas and Paul. The Roman god that they misunderstood Barnabas to be was Jupiter. The god that they misunderstood Paul to be was Mercury. The original names of those gods in the Greek culture, they misunderstood Barnabas as Zeus, the

father, and Paul as Hermes, because Paul was talking. Since Paul was talking, they thought he must be Hermes, and the other one must be Zeus, because Hermes is the messenger. That was their misunderstanding: they took what God did through this healing, and they attributed it to pagan deities.

One of the things that is sort of interesting is that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, then Daniel saw it also. He saw different kingdoms that would trample down the nation of Israel during the times of the Gentiles. The head of gold would be Babylon, which trampled down Israel from about 605 to 539 BC. The chest and arms would be Medo-Persia, which trampled Israel down from about 339 to 63 BC. The belly and thighs of bronze would be Greece, which trampled Israel down later. Then would come the two legs of iron—Rome.

As Daniel is describing this vision, he says:

"As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time"
(Daniel 7:12).

Although Persia conquered Babylon politically, the pagan deities of Babylon continued to live in Persia. They were just renamed. Although Greece conquered Persia politically, the pagan deities of Babylon and Persia continued to live in Greece. They just got different names. Although Rome came along and conquered Greece politically, the pagan deities of Greece continued to live in Rome and under Roman authority. That is what Daniel 7:12 is talking about when it says, "As each empire came to power, an extension of life was given to it."

Most historians would put it this way: Rome conquered Greece politically, but Greece conquered Rome culturally, because the Grecian deities continued to live in Rome, it is just that the Romans gave them different names. The Roman names for these gods were Jupiter and Mercury, but really they were the Greek gods named Zeus and Hermes.

That is what is being referenced right here. The Lycaonians, in their own language, say, "The gods have come down to us. The guy talking must be Hermes, who is the spokesman. The other guy must be Zeus, the father." They think Paul is Hermes, and they think Barnabas is Zeus.

Does archeology bear this out? Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this:

"It is interesting to note that archeologists have uncovered records of dedications to both gods by men with Lycaonian names. Bruce explains: 'Of two inscriptions of Sedasa, near Lystra, dating from c. A.D. 250...one records the dedication to Zeus of a statue of Hermes along with a sundial, by men with Lycaonian names, the other mentions "priests of Zeus"...A further indication of the joint worship of Zeus and Hermes in these parts is

probably to be found in a stone altar discovered near Lystra...in 1926, dedicated to the "Hearer of Prayers" (presumably Zeus) and Hermes.' These archeological findings prove historically what Luke recorded, namely, that Jupiter and Mercury were the two gods jointly worshiped by the people of Lystra."¹

When Luke records how the apostles were misidentified as Zeus and Hermes—Paul being Hermes, and Barnabas being Zeus—that fits exactly with the archeology that we have of Lycaonia in general, and Lystra in particular.

I had the chance to be on the Dinesh D'Souza podcast, talking about the AI feature that we have through Andy Woods Ministries. He was very interested in that. He sent me some clips of things that he has done, a movie that he is working on, etc. And he has really gotten into this whole subject of biblical archeology, which really has never been his forte. His forte is more politics, culture, that kind of thing, but he just got back from Israel and he has been doing all this study on biblical archeology.

In one of those clips he asks, "Why is the church not shouting this from the rooftops?" This is all new to him. The Bible is not just a nice storybook. Practically everywhere you read in the Bible, there is some archeological data that corroborates what the Bible is talking about.

That is a great question: Why is the church not talking more about this? I think it is very helpful because people need to understand that when you are reading the Bible, particularly something like Acts, you are reading the work of a first-rate historian. This misunderstanding of Paul and Barnabas as deities fits with the archeology of this area. They worship those two deities in this area.

Then you go down to Acts 14:13, and look at what they are doing. These are the unsaved people in Lystra. They see this healing, and they think these two guys are two mythical Greek and Roman deities—Greek deities just with Roman names. There was a whole priesthood that existed worshiping these two gods.

"The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds" (Acts 14:13).

The religious leadership of Lystra not only wanted to misidentify Paul and Barnabas as two Greek deities, but they started to bring sacrifices and they started to worship them. Why would they do that? Again, some background literature is very helpful here. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says:

"The sudden urge to sacrifice to two human beings who were mistakenly identified as the gods Jupiter and Mercury can be understood from the

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 306.

background of the legend of Baucis and Philemon. This legend was recorded by the Roman historian Ovid. It claims that Jupiter and Mercury, disguised as men, came into the Phrygian hill country, but no one in that area was willing to provide hospitality to them, except one elderly man named Baucis and Philemon. The two gods destroyed the local population for its lack of hospitality, before rewarding Baucis and Philemon by making them the priest and the priestess of the temple of Jupiter. This legend was prevalent in Lystra, and because the people had just seen a miracle, they felt that the two gods had come again. Not wanting to be destroyed, they were ready to offer sacrifices."²

There is a reason why the priest brought over these sacrifices. "We know the history, we know the legend. We know that if we do not show proper hospitality these two gods are going to wipe us out. We do not want that to happen." They start to offer these sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, mistaking them to be Zeus and Hermes.

When the apostles finally figure out what they are doing they are not happy about it at all. They do not want this worship. They do not want this acclaim. They do not want these accolades. It is almost like they finally get it translated into their own language that they understand, which I would think would be Greek. In this time period, you have to understand that people probably spoke three to four languages.

In fact, when you look at the different accounts of Jesus dying on the cross in the Gospels and how Jesus is mocked as the King of the Jews, you will find one gospel writer says it was in Hebrew, one gospel writer says it was in Aramaic, and one gospel writer says it was in Koine Greek. Another gospel writer says it was in Latin. You say, "which one is it?" There were probably four signs over Jesus' head as He was dying, mocking Him in the four prevalent languages.

Lycaonian probably was not one of the apostles' languages, but they had it finally translated to them so they could understand in Greek what these people were doing. Now, for the first time, Paul and Barnabas figure out, "These people are worshiping us as gods." What do they end up doing? They say, "Knock it off." Their reaction is really strong. If you look at Acts 14:14, it says:

"But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out in the crowd..." (Acts 14:14).

They do not want to be worshiped. These people want to worship them, but the apostles have absolutely no interest in human worship. When they tore their robes, that is signifying how serious they were about, "Knock it off. Quit. Quit worshiping us." It is from this beachhead, this platform, that has been created here. They give a message and their apostolic message is recorded in Acts 14:15-17.

² Ibid., 307.

As I mentioned a little earlier, this is the first message we have from God's servants to a non-Jewish Gentile, completely and totally pagan audience. They do not say, "Open your Bibles to Exodus 15," because you are dealing with pagans here who are steeped in pagan worldview and would not know anything about the Book of Exodus. You can do that kind of stuff in the synagogue, but you cannot do that stuff with unsaved people because you have no common ground.

This becomes educational regarding how to witness to unsaved people. You use different evangelistic strategies depending on your audience. If you are dealing with someone that has some kind of respect for the Bible, like a Mormon, for example, at least they respect the Bible. The Bible is not their only book, but it is one of their books. You could use the Bible to try to disprove Mormonism. If you are dealing with a Jewish person that has respect for Hebrew Bible but does not really understand that Jesus is a Messiah, you can do what Paul did in Acts 13 and everyone else that we wrote about so far in the Book of Acts, and use Hebrew Bible to show that Yeshua is the long awaited Messiah.

But what if you are dealing with someone that has absolutely no respect for the Bible, has no knowledge of the Bible? How do you evangelize them? You start with the Bible that they do have, which is Creation, and you start to reason from Creation. That is what you see Paul and Barnabas doing here in this first message recorded in the Book of Acts given to pagan Gentile people.

The first thing they do is to issue what I call a question of deniability. They ask a question as they are being worshiped, and people are bringing sacrifices to them. The priest has come out and is offering all of these sacrifices. They are trying to get these people to knock it off, saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? I do not want to be worshiped. I am just a servant of the Lord." Go down to the second part of Acts 14:15. This is where they say, "We are mere men, mere servants. We are not here to be worshiped."

"We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you—" (Acts 14:15).

"Why in the world would you worship us when we are men also? We have to put on our shoes one foot at a time, just like you do." (Assuming these people had shoes, I am assuming they had sandals or something.) "Hey, I have to get out of bed one leg at a time, just like you do. Why would you worship me? We are of the same nature as you are."

This reminds me of James 5:17, which talks of Elijah who could alter the weather with his prayers, encouraging us to pray because we have power in prayer. "Elijah was not anything special; he was a human being just like the rest of us."

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours" (James 5:17).

That is what Paul and Barnabas are saying to this audience that has accumulated, thinking that they are gods. "We are just here to preach the gospel." See the word gospel there in Acts 14:15:

"We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you" (Acts 14:15).

What is the gospel? The gospel is good news. "The gospel that you need to be saved is the same gospel that we needed to be saved. The gospel you need to believe is the same gospel that we believed. We all need the gospel, so do not put us on a platform. Do not put us on a pedestal."

One of the things I really appreciate about these guys is that they do not want to deflect glory from God to themselves, which is a tremendous human temptation. If and when God uses your life, people will go up to you and offer all kinds of praise and say, "You are the greatest person that has ever lived," "You are amazing," "You changed my life," and all these kinds of things. There is a human tendency to put your hand back here a little bit and pat yourself on the back. "Lord, You are really lucky to have me on Your team. What would You do without me?"

Once you start doing that, you are cruising for a bruising. I would put it that way, because it is just a matter of time before you go into divine discipline. Unfortunately, people say that kind of stuff about me. I usually say something like, "You need to go talk to my wife, because she will tell you the truth about me." The other thing I like to say is, "Well, praise the Lord. If God spoke through a donkey, He can speak through me." He probably has an easier time with the donkey when you think about it.

So it is, "Praise the Lord." You are deflecting glory back to where it belongs. People do this. They will take people that God uses and they will try to worship them. John the Apostle did this towards the end of his life. He wrote this in 1 John 5:21:

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Yet he did not practice what he preached, because there are two times in the Book of Revelation at the very end where John himself fell into idolatry. This guy is one of the greatest apostles that we have. He was in the inner circle. He was the love apostle, or became that. He is the one that leaned his head against Christ's chest in the Upper Room (John 13:23). He is the one that was called "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

You would think if anyone would not do this, it would be John. But John himself, even though he warns against idolatry at the end of 1 John, becomes an idolater in the Book of Revelation. Why? Because in the Book of Revelation, there is a chain of communication. The vision goes from the Father, to the Son, to an angel, to John, then to a book, then to a reader, and then to the seven churches.

What does John do? He worships the next guy up on the ladder, not understanding that the message did not originate with an angel—the message originated with God the Father, and then it was passed off to God the Son; then it went to an angel. John, when he receives this vision that we now call the Book of Revelation, is so overwhelmed with this that his natural tendency is to worship the servant of God rather than God Himself. The angel says, "Stop it. Knock it off."

This is the guy that said, "Watch out, little children. Do not be caught up with idolatry." He did not practice what he preached. He forgot his own words.

"Then I [John] fell at his feet to worship him. But he [the angel] said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold to the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'" (Revelation 19:10).

This is what Paul and Barnabas are doing. "Do not worship us. We are just servants. We need the gospel just like you do." The funny thing about this is that John blew it here. After being rebuked by an angel, he does the same thing again. Have you ever been rebuked by an angel? It has never happened to me. You would think John would get it together, but he does the same thing at the end of the book, and he has to be rebuked a second time.

"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he [the angel] said, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God'" (Revelation 22:8-9).

""You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"" (Matthew 4:10).

*"I am the Lord, that is My name;
I will not give My glory to another,
Nor My praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).*

Be very careful about taking a little glory off the top for yourself. God is never happy when we do that. That is why, when you select leaders in a church like elders, 1 Timothy 3:6 says that you should not put a novice, a new convert, into a position of authority in the church. Why not? Lest he fall into the trap of Satan. We know all about Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-17). He was lifted up with pride on account of his beauty, and he lost his position in the heavenlies on account of his pride.

When you put someone that really has not spent a lot of time walking with the Lord, that is a fairly new Christian, into a place of authority in the church you are almost setting them up for a disaster, because if the Lord uses them in that role, they are going to think that God is using them because they are so great. What would God do without them?

God does not share His glory with people. He will discipline that person. It is ugly when it happens. I think it was Billy Graham that said that there are three things to avoid in ministry. Number one, do not touch the gold, meaning financial scandal. Number two, do not touch the girls, meaning sexual scandal. Number three, do not touch the glory, meaning interfering with glory that should only go to God.

When you watch people in ministry that fall, it is always like clockwork. Someone falls and you say, "What was it? Was it gold? Was it girls? Was it glory?" Sometimes it is a combination of all three. It is always the same thing. I have a lot of associates that have fallen and are rehabilitated and brought back, but their sphere of influence is never the same, ever. I do not know of any case where it is.

I can just go right down the list. One night I actually made a list of all the people I know that have fallen in ministry, and it was ugly. I would look at that name: "That one was gold. That name, that one was girls. That one was glory." Sometimes I would have to put a double G next to somebody, because it was some combination thereof. We need to be very cautious about this.

I love what Paul and Barnabas are doing. They tore their robes, got out in front, and said, "Stop. Do not worship us. We are like-minded individuals like you. We need the gospel. Just like you, we are servants of the Lord." They call this group to repentance.

"And saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We are also of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God'" (Acts 14:15).

This reminds me of 1 Thessalonians 1:9, speaking of brand new Christians:

"For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

That is repentance. Repentance is a change of mind. You are going away from what you were doing, and you have changed your mind about that. Now you are placing your faith and trust completely in Jesus for salvation. Your mind changed about whatever it was that was keeping you from Jesus.

If Greek mythology is keeping you from Jesus, then change your mind about that. If atheism is keeping you away from Jesus, then change your mind about that. If works salvation is keeping you away from Jesus, then change your mind about that and turn away from these vain things.

You will notice that paganism is described as vain things:

"...And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them..." (2 Kings 17:15).

*"I hate those who regard vain idols,
But I trust in the Lord" (Psalm 31:6).*

"Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile..." (Isaiah 44:9).

*"But they are altogether stupid and foolish
In their discipline of delusion—their idol is wood!" (Jeremiah 10:8).*

*""For My people have forgotten Me,
They burn incense to worthless gods
And they have stumbled from their ways"" (Jeremiah 18:15).*

What is keeping people from Jesus? The horoscopes, astrological projections, channeling, a works salvation? What the Bible says about all that stuff is that it is a vain thing—it is powerless. Turn away from that, meaning you are placing your faith in Christ, so your mind is changed about whatever it is that was holding you from Christ. You are moving away from something that is vain to something that is alive, that can actually help you—the God who made you and redeemed you.

*"Bel has bowed down, Nebo [Babylonian gods] stoops over;
Their images are consigned to the beasts and the cattle.
The things that you carry are burdensome,
A load for the weary beast" (Isaiah 46:1).*

"Israel, you love all these idols. You are getting tired carrying them around all the time, carrying these idols around and wearing yourself out. Do your arms ever get fatigued, Israel, carrying these worthless statues around?" Then Isaiah asks that question, "Are those things that you are carrying around, that are making you so tired, going to be able to carry you when you get old?" That is what Isaiah asks. "Because the day is going to come where you are not even going to have the strength to carry these dumb, vain statues around anymore. You are actually going to need someone to carry you. Do you think your idols are going to help you when that day comes? No way. You need an encounter with the living God."

*"They stooped over, they have bowed down together.
They could not rescue the burden,
But have themselves gone into captivity.
'Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,
You who have borne by Me from birth
And have been carried from the womb;
Even to your old age i will be the same,
And even to your graying hairs I will bear you!*

*I have done it, and I will carry you;
And I will bear you and I will deliver you" (Isaiah 46:2-4).*

Everybody today is walking around with their phone all the time, looking at their phone. I guess you can call the paramedics, but when you really need help, do you think that phone is going to help you? Maybe to some extent, but not like God can. Why are we spending all of this time staring at a screen when that screen, when the day of trouble comes, is not going to be able to help me? I am going to need a relationship with the living God that helps me.

"...and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk" (Revelation 9:20-21).

My phrase for this is the idiocy of idolatry. An idol is anything you worship instead of God. Why would you invest your life into a statue, a horoscope, or an astrological projection? You are investing into something that is vain and it is really not even alive. You need a relationship with the God that made you. That is how to understand repentance.

Lewis Sperry Chafer says:

"This vital newness of mind is a part of believing, after all, and therefore it may be and is used as a synonym for believing at times...Repentance nevertheless cannot be added to believing as a condition of salvation, because upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only..."³

Should we repent, or should we believe? Should we believe, or should we repent? The answer is yes. When a person trusts Christ, their mind simultaneously has changed away from whatever it was that was holding them back from Jesus.

At the age of 16, I heard the gospel for the first time. Maybe it was not the first time, but it was the first time I understood it. I was asked the question, "Why should God let you into heaven?" And when I heard it, I went into my works. "I have done this, I have done that. I am good, I try hard, I, I, I, I, I." When I heard the actual message of the gospel, what happened was that I trusted in the message. As I trusted in the message, my mind simultaneously changed away from my works mentality.

In a nanosecond, I understood that my good works were not going to save me. My mind changed away from that, to Jesus. I believed and repented simultaneously. That is what biblical faith is. I do not think you can have faith without a change of mind, the way I am describing it here. That is what Lewis Sperry Chafer says. It is not to repent, step one, and believe, step two."

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 7, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 265-66.

I enjoyed Curtis Bowers very much when he was here, but he did try to promote a little bit, without me really knowing it, Ray Comfort. And Ray Comfort, if you watch him on media, is very good at getting people lost, but he is not so good at getting people saved. The Ray Comfort gospel is that you have to repent of all of your sins, step one, and then believe, step two. In other words, clean yourself up, step one, and come to Jesus, step two. That is a false gospel. If my justified status before God is based on my ability to clean myself up first, that is a work, is it not?

What is a proper understanding of the gospel? A proper understanding of the gospel is that you hear the gospel, you trust in it, and your mind changed simultaneously with whatever was holding you back from Jesus. If it was works salvation, if it was atheism, if it was paganism, your mind just changed. It has nothing to do with "repent of your personal sins."

Do not get me wrong. Once the Holy Spirit is inside of you, believe me, He will start to deal with personal sins, but that has to do with growth. We are not dealing with growth here, we are dealing with an initial salvation.

These folks needed to trust in the Savior. What was holding them back was all of this pagan theology. As they put their trust in the Savior, their minds were automatically changing away from all of that other stuff that held them back. We are not dealing with the Texas Two-Step here. There are not two steps to coming to Jesus. There is one step.

When you get into the Ray Comfort sort of theology, he does not make these kinds of distinctions. That is why we do not really promote, here at Sugar Land Bible Church, Ray Comfort's videos and things of that nature, because we do not think his gospel presentation is very clear or correct, although he does a good job at telling people they are sinners.

What happens now as you get to the end of Acts 14:15-17, is Paul starts to explain to these Gentiles what this living God is like that they are turning to. The first thing he says about God is that He is the living God. He is not a vain God like all of these idols that they were worshiping. "They are vain, they are powerless. You need to change your mind about those things and turn to the God that is actually alive—the living God." That is why 1 Thessalonians 1:9 describes God as the "living and true God."

"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

We do not worship a dead Savior. We worship a Savior that is alive and at the right hand of the Father. If we did not work, if we were worshiping a non-living savior, it does not make any sense to pray. We pray because we believe that Jesus is alive at the right hand of the Father. He not only came out of the grave, but He ascended back to heaven. He took His seat at the Father's right hand.

Although this ministry is not the Millennial Kingdom, it is a ministry that He is performing as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is sustaining Creation; He is head over the church; He is groom over the church; He is building the church; He is bestowing spiritual gifts. It is hard to do this if you are dead, right? These are things you do when you are alive. He is operating in His high priestly role; He is the one that keeps us.

He is interceding for you right now. Did you know that? He is your advocate. Talk about a good defense attorney. He is the guy to hire. He restores fellowship when we break it with Him. He is also active in disciplining us. It sounds to me like He is alive.

Turn from these vain things because they are holding you back from trusting in Christ. Put your faith in Christ. As you put your faith in Christ, your mind automatically changed, which is what repentance means—change of mind. "Metanoeo": "meta," in your cancer has metastasized, changed from one part of the body to another, which is never good; and "noeo" is where you get the word "notion" or "idea," which comes out of the mind. "Metanoeo," the Greek word for "repentance" literally means "change of mind."

Change your mind away from these vain things that are keeping you from Jesus, and put your trust in Christ. As you are putting your trust in Christ, you just changed your mind about vanity. Now you have come to the real God, the living God, who created this whole world.

Do you see how he is appealing to the Bible that they had, which was Creation?

"...turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and that all that is in them" (Acts 14:15).

This is probably referring to Exodus 28:11, although they may not have known Exodus about how God created everything in six days. It is repeated in Exodus 31:15-17, referring to God bringing the heavens and the earth and all that is in them into existence during the creation week.

You see what Paul is appealing here to. He is appealing to general revelation, not special revelation. When he is in the synagogue, special revelation; when he is with unsaved Gentiles, general revelation. God has disclosed Himself in His word, but He has also disclosed Himself in Creation.

General revelation would be things like nature and conscience. Special revelation would be things like the incarnation, Scripture, and miracles. General revelation is available to all. Special revelation is available to some that will take the time to access the Bible. General revelation can make you aware that God exists, because this world that we are living in is not accidental. There is an obvious designer.

Think about that. As the Earth moves around the sun at just the right distance to sustain life, not too close that we burn to death—although it feels like it in Texas sometimes—

not too far away that we freeze to death. Here we are, orbiting at exactly the right distance from the sun. Do you mean to tell me there is no God? That is crazy.

General revelation makes you accountable to search for God. Special Revelation will take you a step further and will give you the information you need to be saved. General revelation is typically not written, it is nonverbal. Special revelation is typically written down. The quality of general revelation is natural. The quality of special revelation is supernatural or miraculous.

You will notice that when Paul is in the synagogue, he is in this category. That is all we have seen all the way through the Book of Acts, dealing with people that had respect for Hebrew Bible, which we call the Old Testament. Now he is dealing with people that have no understanding of Hebrew Bible, Tanakh or the Old Testament. Now he is in this category. He is using it as a beachhead to make them aware that they are accountable to God. From that he will preach the gospel. God is living. God is the Creator.