

## ***Two Mistakes Not to Make***

I'd like you to turn to the first book of Athenians, if you would...

What? What do you mean you can't find it? Why is that?

Because it doesn't exist!?! Are you sure???

You're absolutely right! It doesn't exist.

And do you know why there isn't a letter to the Athenian church? The reason there is no letter to the Athenian church is because there wasn't an Athenian church for Apostle Paul to write a letter to.

Though Apostle Paul visited Athens, the greatest apostle of all time, in my opinion, wasn't able to establish a church in Athens. Now, this begs a very, very, very important question. Why wasn't he able to establish a church in Athens? And please, if you could turn the Calvinistic-auto-reply of, "Well, it just must not have been God's will"...please turn that off, at least for today, and hopefully, for the rest of your life. The truth is, the responsibility for planting churches lay in the hands of the body of Christ. The reason is that the Lord has fulfilled His responsibility by already doing everything necessary for churches to be planted. Now, the responsibility is in the hands of those who call themselves followers of Jesus Christ, who have been given more-than-sufficient authority and have been empowered through the baptism in the Holy Spirit to dispel darkness everywhere it rears its ugly head.

The Biblical answer to the question of why Apostle Paul was unable to establish a church in Athens will change your life...absolutely changes your life! When we discover the answer, it will impact you in every area of your life. The answer to the question has the potential to touch every area of your life.

I've heard it said that fools don't learn from their own mistakes...average folks learn from their own mistakes...and wise people learn from the mistakes of others. Well, today we're going to be presented with an opportunity, because of Apostle Paul's and Luke's humility in recording mistakes that were made...this will present us an opportunity not to fall into the trap that Apostle Paul made in Athens.

Now, to answer the question, "Why wasn't Apostle Paul able to establish a church in Athens?" we've got to do a little research in the Scriptures today.

Now, beginning at Acts 17:14 and then to the end of Chapter 17, the Bible recounts for us a pretty detailed report of Apostle Paul's experience in Athens

and the first verse of Chapter 18, tells us where Paul went immediately after his trip to Athens.

*Acts 18:1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. NASU*

What I find very, very interesting is that following his time with the Corinthians, Apostle Paul wrote a letter to them to give the Corinthian church some guidance and encourage them in the faith, as well as confront them about some moral issues. In this letter to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians, and informs us, the inner turmoil he was going through after attempting to walk out his faith in Athens, and attempting to plant a church there, and then coming to Corinth with this turmoil still on his heart. Let's look at that...turn to 1 Cor 2:1

*1 Cor 2:1-5 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you **in weakness** and **in fear** and **in much trembling**, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. NASU*

Apostle Paul had just had a very, very bad experience...he'd just had a bad experience. Whatever experience Apostle Paul had in Athens caused him to come to Corinth "**in weakness** and **in fear** and **in much trembling**..." And the experience was so bad, so horrible, that the root cause for this bad experience... Apostle Paul is **bound and determined** never to let that happen again.

I know exactly what this is like...

Illustr: Not releasing singles ministry into the hands of other capable leaders... never do that again...

His bad experience in Athens was the direct result of 2 very significant, key mistakes...that are recorded for us to learn from, and not make the same mistake in our lives.

He went to Athens and he tried to establish a group of believers in Christ there, a foundation to build on...but in 2 very significant ways, Apostle Paul tried a completely different approach than he had ever done before.

Now, before Silas & Timothy arrived in Athens to partner with Apostle Paul, he looked around the city and observed that the city was full of idols and it provoked his spirit. What Paul did after that was the 2 significant mistakes that Paul made...

**Mistake one**...he worked alone...he didn't wait for Silas & Timothy to come before moving out in ministry.

Acts 17:14-18 15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left. 16 Now **while Paul was waiting for them at Athens**, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. 17 So **he was** (vs. they were) reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with **him** (vs. them).

## I. Two or Three Are Better Than One

Paraphrase...God Doesn't Bless Lone Rangers

Ecc 9:9-10,12 in The Message...says it this way...

9 *"It's better to have a partner than go it alone.  
Share the work, share the wealth.  
10 And if one falls down, the other helps,  
But if there's no one to help, tough!  
12 By yourself you're unprotected.  
With a friend you can face the worst."  
Can you round up a third?  
A three-stranded rope isn't easily snapped."*

Deut 19:15 You need **two or three witnesses** to make a case The Message

Matt 18:19-20 If **two of you agree** down here on earth concerning anything you ask, **my Father in heaven will do it for you**. 20 For **where two or three gather together** because they are mine, **I am there** among them." NLT

Illustr: Going up tree alone, without a scouter or helper...breaking arm

Application: Are you living life as a solo act?

Are you going through life only seeking others to help you with the dreams and goals God has put in your heart, rather than looking for opportunities to help others with the dreams and goals God has given them?

***Mistake two***...he tried reasoning with the Athenians, using persuasive words, superiority of speech and persuasive words of wisdom...his outreach became a “speech-driven” or “verbal” model to reach this community rather than establish a work through a demonstration of the Spirit and the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 17:14-18 15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left. 16 Now ***while Paul was waiting for them at Athens***, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. 17 So ***he was reasoning*** in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with *him*.

For time’s sake, let me summarize verses verses 19-31...it is a detailed account of Apostle Paul attempting to use what he later described as...”superiority of speech” or “persuasive words of wisdom” in reaching out the Athenians, telling them about the resurrection of Jesus without a demonstration of the power to confirm the resurrection...

Let’s now pickup in verse 32...

Acts 17:32-34 32 Now when they ***heard of*** the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." 33 So Paul went out of their midst. 34 But ***some men joined him and believed***, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts 18:1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. NASU

## **II. Expect the Holy Spirit to Confirm His Word through Miracles, Signs, Wonders and Other Gifts**

### **Don’t Ground Your Faith on Men’s Power of Persuasion, but in the Spirit’s Miraculous Power**

What I find interesting in 1 Cor 2:1-5...is that Paul gives us a hint, he alludes to the problem, the root cause of his failure to establish a church in Athens. Look at verse 1, “I did not come with ***superiority of speech or of wisdom***”...look at verse 4, “and my message and my preaching were ***not in persuasive words of wisdom***, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would ***not rest on the wisdom of men***, but on the power of God.”

Somehow, much of today’s Church has evolved into a speech-driven Church...a Church of brief, energetic moral speeches called “sermons & teachings,” as well

as, written speeches called “books” rather than the Church that Jesus died, rose from the dead, and was exalted to the Father’s right hand for her to become. He rose from the dead for a Church that lives and demonstrates the gospel of Jesus Christ which is a gospel of Holy Spirit power...the miraculous resurrection power of the Holy Spirit that we, His children, are baptized in...

Illustr: Play testimony on audio from CD

From 2:42 - 5:19

From 6:00 – 7:40

St. Francis of Assisi said it this way...”preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words”

Heb 2:1-4 1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 **God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** NASU

If someone can be persuaded **with words only** to believe the gospel, the danger is that they can be persuaded **with only words** to doubt or not to believe the gospel...listen again to Paul’s words just after he left Athens and arrived in Corinth...

*1 Cor 2:1-5 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with **superiority of speech or of wisdom**, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you **in weakness** and **in fear** and **in much trembling**, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in **persuasive words of wisdom**, but **in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**, 5 **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power (dunamis – dynamite) of God.** NASU*

John 14:12 "...he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." NASU

This Holy Spirit power is available for all of us who believe and have been baptized in this Holy Spirit power, to move in...for all of us...Eph 4:11-12 mandates that I equip you all to minister with God’s power...

Mark 16:17-18 17 "These signs will accompany **those who have believed**: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them;

**they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.**" 19 So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, **while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.** NASU

Application: Have you embraced a vision or a concept of the Church or even a personal Christianity that is largely or primarily a speech-driven Church or personal life experience?

Have you found yourself shrinking back from opportunities for the Holy Spirit to demonstrate His miraculous power through your anointed hands?

When unbelievers cross your path with physical complications, sicknesses, diseases, etc...do you see yourself drifting towards a verbal gospel only rather than stepping out in faith in the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the gospel of power?

Do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit today, calling you to step out into His Promised Land of the miraculous and to actively demonstrate a trust, a belief, a faith in the Holy Spirit for the miraculous as you lay faith-filled hands on the sick?

Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians reveals to us that Paul learned to return to the roots the Church has in Holy Spirit power not only in Corinth but in later missionary travels...let's close by turning to Acts 4...Peter and John stepped out into the miraculous and saw a man lame from birth healed...speech-driven, religious people had a problem with Peter and John preaching and expecting the miraculous...so they detained them and attempted to intimidate them by incarcerating them and demanding they stop preaching this miraculous gospel...don't you know that Satan has a problem with people believing for the miraculous? Let's pick up in the account where Peter and John are released...

Acts 4:23-31 23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who

MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA,  
AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,

25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,

'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE,

AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?

26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND,  
AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER  
AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'

27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 **while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.**" 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. NASU

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John 15:26-16:1

26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, **He will testify about Me,** 27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning. NASU

Acts 14:3-4 3 Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon **the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.** NASU

1 Cor 2:3-5 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,** 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. NASU