

FINDING GOD
January 10, 2016

What age are you? Have you lived long enough to know heartache, or extreme sadness, or failure? Surely you know that in this world there is a great deal more than success, happiness, and comfort! What do you think of your life? Are you bored? Or, are you excited about it? What are you doing to eradicate boredom and ignite excitement? Are you leaving God out of your life?

Hello, I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

When Jesus' apostle Paul climbed the steps in Athens Greece that led up to the top of Mars' Hill, he was about to address men and women who thought they had the answers to life. Paul received the invitation to speak to this group because some of them had overheard Paul preaching on the streets of Athens. At best those people could only conclude that Paul was preaching about some "strange gods." And since these philosophers were always eager to hear and debate "some new thing," they invited Paul to tell them more about what he was preaching. These philosophers who extended to Paul the invitation to speak were known as **Epicureans and Stoics**. (Acts 17) These two philosophical schools were well-known around the Mediterranean world of the first century. They were prevalent in the city of Athens.

These two schools of thought held opposite views of life, but had no conclusions about an afterlife, nor did they teach a final Judgment of human activity. The Epicureans held that the gods did not care about human affairs, and so the best thing a person could do with his or her life was to get as much pleasure out of life as possible. With them pleasure was the chief good, especially pleasure in food, drink, and cultural pursuits.

The Stoics, however, were fatalists. That is, they believed that all events were determined by the gods and therefore everything that happens to a person is unavoidable! The Stoics believed that a person should calmly accept the divine will and be free from emotions. Stoics were taught to be indifferent to pain or pleasure. Stoics believed in a sort of pantheism, that is, God was everywhere and in everything. The Stoics insisted on self-discipline and self-righteousness.

In the streets of Athens Paul had seen an altar dedicated to the "Unknown God." And so Paul started his discourse with that inscription. Paul said, "...As I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [This Paul said referring to the articles of food and drink left at the altars in the city.] [Paul continued...This God who needs nothing...] (26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. [The ancient people, (and some people even today), have their territorial gods, national gods or national religion.] Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (28) for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'" (29) Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (32) Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." (33) So Paul went out from their midst." (Acts 17:23-33 ESV) Well, Paul's sermon was cut short by mockery and derision. There are people even today who cut short any discussion of God by the same means: mockery and laughter. How do you handle a discussion about God and religion? Do you "laugh it off"?

Most people I know do not want to have a public discussion about God. They want to hear that kind of talk only in the church houses. They do not want to hear it in schools, or the courthouse, or the streets of the city, or even on the airways, or on "Mars Hill" where the "scholars" sit! How do you handle a discussion about God?

However, Paul made some interesting comments in the short time allotted to him. I'm particularly interested in Paul's statement that God is "not far from each

one of us." (vs. 27). Then Paul said, "In him (in God) we live, and move, and have our being." (vs. 28). That is close! Friends, the human spirit that inhabits your body is from God. He gave it to the first human beings and they passed it on down the line. It is said in the first book of the Bible that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Genesis 1:26) And so, all the descendants of Adam and Eve bear the image of their Creator. No wonder Paul could say that it is "in God" that we live, and move, and have our existence. The Epicureans and the Stoics only discussed what to do with their lives while living. Jesus' apostle Paul wanted to talk about WHY we have a life to begin with! We have a life because God gave it to us! This ultimately means that we are accountable to the ONE who has given us life! And indeed, Paul put it this way, "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [In other words: God is NOT the work of skillful people; people are God's work.] (30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this [God] has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:29-31 ESV) A Day of Accountability has been fixed! People will give an answer to God about the way they have lived. This is the meaning of Christ's resurrection. That great Resurrection of Jesus Christ shows the world there is life after death. And the life we now live will be the basis upon which judgment will be made about our future existence. Will we continue our existence with God, who is right now not far from any of us? Or, will we be separated from God; will God finally leave us?

Friends, God is now working on you! That's right! God is not far from you. You bare His image. You are His creation. What are you doing with your life? Are you like the Epicureans who are only seeking pleasure? Do you say like them, "let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may die!" Or, are you like the Stoics who would say, "brace up, stand up, face your fate, face your death; die with honor for death is the end!" Which philosophy do you follow? What do you believe? Do you believe that God is not far from you; do you believe that in Him you live, and move, and have your being? Do you believe that the God who made you will hold you accountable because there is existence beyond the grave?

Paul told those Athenians that God wanted them to seek God, and perhaps feel after Him, and thus find Him. No matter where you live in this world, you can find

God! Do you live on an island? You can seek for God and find Him. Do you live in the city, or in the country? You can seek for God and find Him. Do you now live day by day in your sins? Nevertheless, you can seek for God and find Him. You can find God by seeking Him in the teaching of Jesus Christ. That's right! The man who preached on Mars Hill in Athens Greece also said this, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7 ESV) Where can you see "the glory of God"? You see it in the "face of Jesus Christ." Paul referred to himself when he said, "jars of clay." You see, God has put the "treasure" in the hands of human beings. And the purpose of this is to show that Jesus' great salvation is God's power, not man's. I too am a jar of clay; easily broken, living in a world that easily can break me to pieces. But as I open my mouth and share with you the teachings of Christ, you can see the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." I am many miles from you, but God is not far from any of you. And as this message comes to your ears, you can believe; you can repent of your sinful life; you can submit your body to someone who will baptize you "into Jesus Christ." (Galatians 3:27) As the apostle Paul wrote, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:13-18 ESV) Friends, you can seek God and find Him in the teaching and the life of Jesus Christ. You can find Jesus' teaching in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Do you have a copy? We urge you to seek after God. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these [earthly] things will be added unto you." Jesus also said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8 ESV) Visit a church of Christ near you and they will help you seek after and find the God who loves you and wants you with Him in eternity.