

“All Things to All Men”: Paul Preaches to the World



SABBATH—JULY 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Acts 11:19–26; Acts 13:16–42; Acts 17:18–34.

MEMORY VERSE: “To those who are weak I became weak. That was to win the weak” (1 Corinthians 9:22, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: The apostle Paul is trying to bring the gospel¹ to the world. He encourages us to learn how to adjust (change) the method of giving our message. This depends on the message itself and the culture² in which we are witnessing.

ADVENTIST MISSIONARY PIONEERS quickly learned that they needed to share our present-truth message in a way that would make sense to the people living in their time. Today the Global Mission project of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church supports study centers around the world. They study ways to build bridges to people of other religions and cultures. Before we can communicate well with other people, we need to understand their culture and ways of thinking.

This week we explore what it means to adjust and change our message to people in different situations. We look at the different ways in which Paul shared the message of Jesus with different crowds of people. What can we learn from Paul that will better help us reach people with Bible truth?

1. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

2. culture—the way people live, dress, think, eat, and socialize with one another.

SUNDAY—JULY 6**PAUL ENCOURAGED FOR MISSION (Acts 11:19–24)**

After Paul's Damascus road experience,³ some of the apostles did not believe that he was a true disciple (follower) (read Acts 9:26). Perhaps they feared that Paul was a spy sent to destroy the church and cause more problems. At that time, Barnabas stood up for Paul and defended him (verses 27, 28).

Barnabas was "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24, NIV). And Barnabas was a big help to Paul as he began his ministry (work for Jesus).

In Acts 11:19–24, how did the church begin in Antioch? How successful was its work?

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem heard about the new group of believers in Antioch. Antioch was one of the three leading cities of the Roman Empire at that time. Quickly the church leaders sent the well-known Barnabas to help strengthen and build up the Antioch church.

According to Acts 11:25, 26, why does Barnabas choose Paul to help him?

The book of Acts is full of surprising events. Saul, the attacker, becomes Paul, the missionary.⁴ The gospel of salvation⁵ becomes good news for all, not just for the Jews. And now Paul works for a church that exists because of his earlier efforts against the church.



The good news about Jesus was for all people, not just for the Jews.

For a year Barnabas and Paul taught the people. As the church grew stronger, it developed a spirit of compassion (mercy; great love) and helped others. The new church members sent money to their brothers and sisters in Judea, who were suffering from a very bad famine (Acts 11:28–30). So, they were not going to selfishly keep their own blessings all to themselves. When a need came, they were ready to help.

3. Damascus road experience—Paul's vision of Jesus that changed his life. Paul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians.

4. missionary—a person sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

5. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

The church in Jerusalem learned about Antioch. So, they sent Barnabas to work with the church in Antioch. And Barnabas knew about Paul’s calling. So, he brought Paul to help. And the Antioch church learned about the needs in Jerusalem and sent aid to them.

What lesson can we learn about helping others with the things that we ourselves have been blessed?

MONDAY—JULY 7

ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE (1 Corinthians 9:22)

What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 9:22 when he says that he has “become all things to all people”? (NIRV). We can be sure that whatever his meaning, the apostle is not encouraging compromise.⁶ Paul is not talking about changing the gospel, the doctrines, the principles (rules), or any of the truths of God’s Word. He is talking about making these things as attractive and understandable as possible for different cultures.

Paul used this approach by using different methods to reach different people. For example, in trying to reach Jews, Paul would arrive in a city, visit the synagogue (Jewish church), and teach (read Acts 9:19–22; Acts 13:14–16).

In his sermon, where does Paul’s short history of the Bible in Acts 13:16–42 begin and end? What authority (source of power) does Paul use to prove that Jesus is the Messiah? What does this tell you about Paul’s method in teaching Jewish people?

How is the way Paul talks to the pagans⁷ in Acts 14:8–18 different from his speeches to the Jews? (Keep in mind that the pagans did not believe in the Old Testament.)

Paul does not use the Bible as an authority. (But he does point to the Old Testament in verse 15.) He does it in the way he might quote a poet, not as an authority. Rather, Paul points to the natural world and the proof that nature gives of a Creator God. And he points out that worshiping idols is useless.



Paul taught that nature gives proof of a Creator God.

6. compromise—willingness to give up and accept some ideas and principles (rules) to make an agreement work.

7. pagans—people who are not Christians, Muslims, or Jews. In the world of ancient (old-time) Greece and Rome, pagans were those who had many gods.

How far should we be willing to go in trying to reach people in their own culture? How can we avoid the dangers of going too far? How can we not compromise⁸ in trying to spread the gospel?

TUESDAY—JULY 8

A WITNESS TO THE PHILOSOPHERS⁹ (Acts 17:18–34)

One of Paul’s most well-known missionary projects happened in Athens. The city of Athens was the home of some of the world’s greatest philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. But, even with all the philosophy, reason, and freethinking, the city was still “wholly given to idolatry”¹⁰ (Acts 17:16, KJV). This is a good example of how philosophy cannot satisfy basic human needs in the end.

How did Acts 17:18–34 show that Paul tried to reach these people? What did he not use? How successful was his work?

Epicureans taught that the highest happiness comes from living a life free from pain and fear. So, they avoided anything that caused fear or pain to the mind or body. This in-

cluded not hurting others, overeating, drinking too much, or having too much sex. But the Stoics believed that wisdom, self-control, and good all lie within the soul. Stoics also believed in freeing one’s soul from passion or emotion that comes from bad judgment and from reacting to things in life in the wrong way. A Stoic achieves this freedom from passion by examining his or her own thoughts and through living a life of virtue (goodness; purity). This helps free the mind from suffering and brings clear judgment and peace. Together Stoic and Epicurean philosophers heard Paul in the marketplace and started to argue with him. They called Paul a “babbler [foolish speaker]” (Acts 17:18, NIV).

These philosophers laughed at Paul. But they invited him to speak at a meeting of the Areopagus¹¹—a group of philosophers that studied new teachings on Mars’ Hill.

In his speech, Paul gives his message to his pagan hearers (verses 22–25) by connecting with their culture. Paul points to an altar they had built to the unknown god and he says, “Now I am going to tell you about this ‘unknown god’ that you worship” (Acts 17:23, NIV).

8. compromise—keeping something and giving up something to reach an agreement. Christians should not compromise their beliefs to get something else.

9. philosophers—persons who study human thought about the meaning of life, how mind relates to matter, and the problems of right and wrong.

10. idolatry—idol worship (bowing down to statues); loving something more than we love God.

11. Areopagus—a hill named for the Greek god of war, Ares, and located in the ancient (old-time) city of Athens. Later, the Romans renamed it Mars’ Hill after Mars, the Roman god of war. It is here that the tribunal (court of law) met. The Areopagus was the highest court of law in ancient (old-time) Athens.



Paul points the Greeks to the altar they had built to the unknown god and says, “Now I am going to tell you about this ‘unknown god’ that you worship” (Acts 17:23, NIV).

Paul does not point to the Bible, as he would with Jewish listeners. Rather, Paul again points to the natural world and connects it with the spiritual world. Paul does not use the Bible. But his message to them is based on the Bible.

In what ways do the things of nature speak to your heart about God? How could you develop a better understanding of our Creator through the things of nature?

WEDNESDAY—JULY 9

THE MESSAGE ON MARS’ HILL (Acts 17:18–34)

Read Paul’s speech in Acts 17:18–34 again. Where do you find in it these basic doctrines (church beliefs about God based on what the Bible teaches): creation, redemption,¹² and judgment? In what ways does it sound like our message, as Adventists?

Paul knew pagan literature.¹³ He also quoted parts of it from memory. First, he quotes a Cretan¹⁴ poet who wrote, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (verse 28, NIV). And second, the pagan Cleanthes,¹⁵ whose love poem to the god Zeus¹⁶ had the line “We are his offspring [children]” (verse 28, NIV). In each quote, Paul takes something from the culture of the people he is speaking to and connects it to the truth he wants to teach them.

“Paul’s hands were wide open toward the temple crowded with idols.¹⁷ There, he poured out his soul to God. And he pointed out the foolishness of the religion of the Athenians.¹⁸

12. redemption—the process (method or way) through which Jesus saves us by buying us back from sin and setting us free through His death on the cross.

13. pagan literature—writings or books written by people who worship idols or nature instead of God. This also includes books written on the topic of worshiping idols or nature instead of God.

14. Cretan—someone who was born or lives on the Greek island of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

15. Cleanthes—a Stoic philosopher (thinker) who was originally a boxer. He lived in the third century B.C. He believed that God was an intelligent life force that lived in the sun. He taught that a person should live a life of virtue (purity and goodness) and not one of pleasure.

16. Zeus—the chief (main) Greek god, ruling over all other gods.

17. idols—statues, pictures, or other objects that were worshiped as gods.

18. Athenians—the citizens who live in the city of Athens.

The wisest of Paul’s hearers were amazed (surprised) as they listened to Paul’s reasoning. Paul showed how well he knew of their works of art, their literature, and their religion.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 237.

Ellen White adds, “Paul’s words hold a treasure of knowledge for the church. Suppose Paul had attacked their gods and the great men of the city. Then he would have been in danger of dying the way Socrates did—by poisoning. But with God’s love, Paul carefully led their minds away from pagan gods by showing them the true God, who was unknown to them.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 241.



The wisest of the Athenians were amazed by Paul’s words.

Paul understood that we must first meet people where they are. Then we can help them change their lives. That means we need to focus on their needs and interests. Then we can give our message in a way that connects with them. This does not mean “covering up” the message. It means talking to people in language they can understand.

What was the one part of Paul’s teaching that caused the greatest disagreement among the Greeks? Why? What should this tell us about the limits of trying to reason with people over all that we believe?

THURSDAY—JULY 10

PAUL’S METHOD¹⁹ OF CHURCH PLANTING (Romans 15:18–23)

How could Paul say in Romans 15:18–23 “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (verse 19, NIV) when most of the people were still not Christians? What does the answer tell us about how we are to judge what success means?

Paul chose to start new church groups in important cities throughout the area. He chose places that were important centers on important Roman roads or seaports. These cities were important trading or government centers. Paul established churches that were important lighthouses throughout the area. He planned on the new

19. method—a way of doing something.

groups of believers taking the good news to the areas around these centers. Paul’s work was finished. But the work of outreach only had begun for the new believers.

On his second missionary²⁰ journey with Timothy and Silas, Paul established a Christian church in Thessalonica, the largest city in Macedonia. It was located at the crossroads of two important Roman highways. It also was the important seaport for the entire area. A strongly established group of believers in this city would make a strong center. From this center, other church plants could grow throughout that area.

This is exactly what happened. Paul says, “So you became a model [example] to all the believers in the lands of Macedonia and Achaia [Greece]. The Lord’s message rang out from you. That was true not only in Macedonia and Achaia. Your faith in God has also become known everywhere” (1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8, NIV).

This church was an example for others. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, was not a Christian word. It was used for any gathering of people in different places. But the Christian *ekklesia* was called to do more than just worship together. They were called to do a special work. They

were to reach out to their communities²¹ with the good news that they themselves had received.

The church was not built just to feed its own members. What is your own attitude (feeling) about this? Do you go to church trying only to get your own needs satisfied? Or do you go hoping to give even more than you receive?

FRIDAY—JULY 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “So [Paul] used different methods of reaching people. He adjusted his message to fit with the situation he was in.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, page 118.

“There are some who will not believe in the truth no matter how it is presented. The worker for God should study and choose carefully the best method so that he may not stir up the people and make them angry.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1890.

“They [God’s workmen] are not to be one-idea men fixed in their way of working. They should not fail to know that their preaching of truth must fit with the class of people among whom they work and the situations they are

20. missionary—having to do with the special duty or work that a church sends a person or group out to do.

21. communities—groups of people living, working, or worshipping together.

in.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, page 119.

“By cheerful, patient kindness and by showing respect for other people, Paul won the hearts of the people.

“He quieted their prejudices,²² and tried to teach them the truth without stirring up their emotions. All this Paul did because he loved the souls of men. And he wanted to bring them to Christ that they might be saved.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 162.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ How would you best communicate your beliefs to an atheist²³ university student? To a person from another religion? To someone who believes the Bible but is not an Adventist? To a former Adventist? To someone who does not seem to care about the

whole question of faith or God?

❷ No matter how different our methods might be, what are some of the common things that must always go with our witness to others? That is, what things should always be front and center of our witness, no matter what the situations are?

❸ How mission-centered is your local church? What can you do to help your church get more involved in outreach to your local community?

SUMMARY: Communication does not take place if the person with whom you are sharing the gospel cannot understand what is being said. Paul gives many examples of how in our witness we must preach the good news in such a way that people can understand.

22. prejudices—opinions already formed against someone or something before learning both sides of the issue; pre-judged ideas.

23. atheist—a person who believes there is no God.