

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

Good morning Life Fellowship. You know one of the challenges of leadership is constantly feeling like no matter how much you communicate you can't get all of the story out about what God is doing in a place. We have a strategy that we call 'carpet bombing' in terms of how we communicate, and we use our aps, we use Facebook, we use Twitter, we use Instagram, we use our church bulletin, we use a weekly newsletter, we use our website, we use our Look Through Life, and we use the service, and we do our best to try to tell you all the good things going on.

But in spite of all those avenues it is still limited. And you know it is ironic because every once in a while someone says, *'I just never know what is going on.'* But honestly we do our best, and I wish you could see what I see. I wish sometimes you could just kind of follow me around, because when we are in leadership we see all these things and we assume that everyone else sees them too.

And I was just thinking this morning how we got to hear from Debbie Wood. I wish you all could know Debbie Wood's story behind the scenes. Just a few months ago we wondered whether or not she was even going to live. She has been under deep chemotherapy and treatment for cancer, and today for her to be up here to give that announcement was just a huge answer to prayer. We had a prayer time over her just a few months ago. And it is one of those God stories that you look at and you just think, *'I wish everybody could hear that.'*

You know I see things throughout the week for instance, and this morning I saw people just bringing all kinds of food in through the lobby. And as soon as we get done here the whole place is going to be alive for several hours as we set up for Christmas. And you are probably thinking, *'Christmas already?'* But Thanksgiving falls really late this year and so we need to be decorating for Christmas. And literally scores and scores of people are going to be doing that.

I was here Wednesday night, or Thursday night, and there was a big group of people here. We have two dozen people going to Germany in a couple of weeks to do a missions trip. They are going to be singing in some of the great halls and cathedrals there in Germany as well as giving a Christmas concert working with some partner churches over there. Then I was here on Tuesday morning and I saw lots of people come in. And many people don't even know this, but we have an addiction group meeting here, an AA group, that meets in here on Tuesday mornings. We have people who work with them and try to encourage them during their time of battle with addiction.

Then on Thursday morning there were lots of moms here because our Mops program goes on then. Mops stands for mothers of pre-schoolers. On Monday night our elders were here, and there was also a men's Bible study going on. And the elders meet

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

and pray about the things that are going to go on in this room. Wednesdays there is a ladies' Bible study that goes on. And by the way tonight there is going to be lots of teenagers all over the place as we have our Student Life. Wednesday nights our college group meets, and they had a great meeting at one of our homes last Wednesday night.

Pastor Brad told me that one of the people in our church has started three new Life Communities in their community in the last six months. That is one person doing three different Life Communities. I know of two other people who are getting a Life Community going, and we have five in Mooresville that have also recently started, so there are all these things going on.

Last week I was in Boca Raton as a part of a missions group called 'The Timothy Initiative,' and I was able to present a check for \$45,000 from you all that will be used to plant a hundred and fifty churches around the world. I got to meet the guys that will be leading the sessions for men who are going to be taught and trained so they can go plant churches in a very strategic way across Nepal, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka and countries that most of us will never go to, and yet you are having an impact with that.

I got an email from the Perkins daughter, Rachel, this week and she is in missions. One of the things we said at the beginning of the year was we wanted to be a sending church. And we have young people who were in this church a year ago and now they are out on the mission field. I know of at least three there now, and a possible two others that are preparing. Young people in college or just graduating from high school are doing mission work around the world.

Folks, a lot of good stuff going on here and I sure wish I had time to tell you all about it. (*Applause.*) And I want to say thank you for your ongoing commitment of faithfulness, giving, and sharing. That is the work of the ministry and the work of church. It is not about staff doing it; it is about the body doing it, and I am just so encouraged. I told someone the other day that I felt so privileged to be able to pastor the best church in the country. I know other people like to talk about their churches, but Pastor Ben and I talk about you guys all the time, how much we love you, and what a blessing it is to serve here in this capacity.

Now we are going to be in Acts Chapter 17 this morning. This will be the final time this year we are going to be in the book of Acts in this study. Next week we are going to start five weeks of advent as we prepare for Christmas and the coming of Christ. Then we will have a big family communion service the last Sunday of the year. And then the first Sunday of the year we will start talking about what we are going to be doing in 2020. So all these things are being planned and lined up.

## **A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US Dan Burrell**

---

By the way, Advent this year is really cool as we have designed a series called, 'Do you hear what I hear?' It is on five great Christmas songs. We are going to talk about what we see in Scripture, and then we are going to celebrate different songs that we sing culturally as well. The decorations will be around it, we have sermons on Christmas music, and we are going to be looking at the theology behind great Christmas music. And I think that is going to be interesting and an encouragement for us as well.

So we have been in the book of Acts, and actually 50 percent of the sermons in 2019 have been in the book of Acts. That was by design; we wanted to spend one year talking to the church about what it means to be a sending church, what it means to be a church that is making an impact, starting in Jerusalem and into all of the world. So we have systemically gone through three different sections. Pastor Ben really ended it last week as he was looking in Chapter 13. He told me what he wanted me to do was to take the favorite part of Scripture that I wanted to preach from the remaining chapters in the book of Acts. And I knew exactly what I wanted to teach on.

So we are going to be what I consider to be one of the classic sermons in all Scripture. In fact Adolf Deissman said that Paul's Areopagus sermon was the greatest missionary document in the New Testament. I would say on a personal level that I think it is the greatest apologetic sermon, or speech, in the New Testament as well. Because in this passage that we are going to study is Paul's sermon that we sometimes call Mars Hill, or at the Areopagus, and it deals with all the big questions in life - origins, where did life come from, authority, purpose, order, power, intent, and design. All of these are occurring in this message in what was the actual seat of philosophy and thinking of the world at that time. This was ground zero for these conversations.

And Paul was speaking to a very confused culture that was floundering in a hot pool of isms and phony religions. And when I read that passage I think, '*Wow, that is us today,*' because our culture today is floundering in a hot pool of phony isms and fake religions as well. So that is why I wanted us to address that today. In order for this to occur I am going to do something a little out of the ordinary. I want to take an extra amount of time in the introduction, and then I am going to pound home the message and give a quick application at the end. That is how I am going to approach this, but I think in order for you to really wring out everything that is in this you will have to spend time studying this yourselves. We could actually do an entire series in 2020 on this message as there is just so much in it.

The sermons on Sundays are supposed to be the appetiser. And then we want you to go home and study it deeper. We want you to do this in your Life Communities, in your own homes, and in your family devotions. In fact Pastor Brad can give you kind of

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

a tool that we use in a lot of our Life groups as they go into the next week after the Sunday sermons.

So I think in order to set you up for this message I need you to understand some historical context. I think most of you know one of my degrees is in history education. I love history, and I love it so much I married a history teacher. I just really enjoy history. And when we understand the historical context of Paul's message here, I think it will make this message pop; it will come alive for you. So let me spend a few moments doing this.

This sermon takes place in the city of Athens. We think of Athens today as a historical city that we all would like to visit. It is a cruise ship destination, or a place where you can stop when you are touring Europe. And we look at the Parthenon and the great iconic scenes that exist of ancient Athens. Well, the ancient Athens that we could visit today really were once occurring at the time of Paul's message. What we see now are just the relics, the leftover parts of it.

Athens was the home of one of the top three universities in the world during that time. In fact one of the other of the three top universities was found in the city of Tarsus, and you remember Paul was from Tarsus. So when Paul is going to Athens to preach this sermon, remember he had grown up and had been educated in Tarsus. Now he is in Athens, and this would be like someone who was educated at Harvard and now he is visiting the campus of Yale or MIT.

In the world of academia we have several college professors in here, and several of you work at Davidson, UNC Charlotte, and some of the other local colleges, and you know the academic world and the college campus environment is kind of a weird world. It is kind of an interesting bubble of philosophy, conjecture, theory and debate. And it is kind of like visiting a foreign planet.

But for Paul this would have been cool for him to be able to go to Athens. He was there as a missionary, but I have a sense because Paul was as human as you and I are, there had to be this little bit of a tourist bug in him as well. By the way this was the hometown of Socrates and Plato. It was the birthplace of many of the civic institutions and traditions that are still held in high regard in our country today. For instance the public school system and some of our court systems, the ideas for these were birthed in the great thinking centers of Rome and particularly in Athens. So those traditions, that heritage is still attached to this day.

It was a veritable laboratory of art, science, religion and philosophy. But at this time Athens was well beyond their peak year of the Greco Roman history portion of

## A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US Dan Burrell

---

civilization. It was well beyond its peak; it was a civilization and it was a city in decline. And it was literally collapsing under the weight of its own paganism, selfishness, hedonism, open-mindedness, and just outright decadence that had kind of settled in this big metropolitan area.

Today we visit the fossilized remains of that heyday as tourists, but those statues and those facades and those ruins are also monuments to a system that was built on false, phoney and unsound lies and philosophy. And when you see that you need to be remembering this. There were a ton of religions that were based right there in Athens; it was like their information center right there. There were the Platonists and there were the Jews who specifically Paul went and addressed. There were the Emperor cults that worshipped the various Caesars.

There are still some ruins today of temples such as Aphrodite, who was the female god of fertility and sexual pleasure. In fact the women who attended to temple of Aphrodite during the daytime were priestesses, and during the night time they were prostitutes. They literally plied their trade in the evenings to fund their ministry during the day. It was just an incredibly decadent time. There was a temple to Apollo and there was a temple to Poseidon that were located right there in Athens.

But there were two particularly dominant philosophical groups or threads that were there that are mentioned in this passage that we are about to read and they were the Epicureans and there were the Stoics. The Epicureans were interesting, and by the way we see that term today, like if you ever read restaurant views it may say something like, *'Oh, I went to such and such a restaurant and it was an epicureal delight.'* And that is where we get that word from. The Epicureans liked the finer things of life. They lived for pleasure, and they particularly liked fine food and that was something that was important to them. Overall you would say they pursued fine living; they thought themselves just a little sophisticated.

The founder's name was Epicurus and he was an existentialist, and I don't want to get too deep into this. If you like stuff like this you would enjoy it, and if you don't, you probably would just wonder why I was using all these big words anyway. But an existentialist is a guy that believes that truth exists in this moment, in the experience that you are in at this moment. It is an existentialist that says, *'if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?'* That is an existentialist question. In other words they live in the moment; they live in experiences and sensations.

So the Epicureans then came from Epicurus, who was an early existentialist who said, *'Do you know what life is about? It is about wine, women and song. It is about good things. It is about fun times. It is about feasting.'* And there were kind of two

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

types of Epicureans. One kind went overboard and they were the gluttons, the ones who hit the Golden Corral, and it was not about the quality but the quantity.

By the way some believe that in the Roman culture they would have vomitoriums. If you have ever visited there you would be able to see places that had troughs along the wall, and there would be holders for feathers, which were supposed to be used to induce vomiting. And then they could go back out and eat another round. Talk about a social experience - doesn't that sound delightful? And how would you like to have been the poor servant who had to flush out the troughs and clean them up. So it was not about eating to sustain yourself, but eating at a pagan level just for the sake of eating. That was an extreme of Epicureans.

The other type of Epicureans, which comprised the greater number, were more refined about things. Last week I was at a restaurant that was very fancy, and I wasn't paying thankfully, but I have noticed that the cheaper the food the greater the quantity, and the more expensive the food you have to search for it on your plate. Have you ever noticed that? And I was still hungry when I finished and needed to go get a McRib or something after this expensive meal that probably cost 75 or 80 bucks. (*Laughter.*) But that was the Epicurean way; it was in the pleasure of the moment, the presentation of the food, and all of that. So these guys were materialists and they were Atheists; they found their joy and their truth in experience and not through reason. And often the highfalutin Epicureans sought a very careful balance of life that pursued pleasure and avoided pain. And this was half of the audience that Paul is preaching to.

The other half of the audience were the Stoics. And the stoics were real resolved, stiff upper lip type of people. They were very disciplined. And by the way I have asked Pastor Ben to let me have a whole month of sermons on worldviews sometime, because there are really only two worldviews - either you believe God or you don't. Those are really the only two worldviews, and it goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Either you believe that God meant what He said, or you don't. But on the 'I don't side' there are all these different threads.

And part of this Stoic thread includes Buddhism, New Ageism and so on. It is like putting down your desires, putting down your emotions, putting down experiences, and just being rational or natural in the way you think. And the Stoics were this way. Pleasure was not viewed as good; pain was not viewed as evil; you just got through life worrying about reason and self-sufficiency. They were unmoved by inner feelings or outward circumstances; they just tried to approach everything very logically. I try to describe it this way - and some of you are not old enough to remember this - but in the original Star Trek if you can picture Spock having a love child with the Dalai Lama, then

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

that would be Stoicism. This would be someone that is almost a machine in the way they process information.

So there were two groups. One group was the Epicureans who wanted the finer things of life, who wanted pleasure and fine living. Their lives would be spent pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. The second group would be the Stoics and they would just endure life, they would be logical and reach rational conclusions, they didn't care about pleasure, and pain was just to be endured. These were the two groups that Paul was going to address.

And all of them are coming together and hearing the message of Christianity that Paul was preaching, and it caught their attention. They did not understand it, so this is where the confusion breaks out. They thought Paul was talking about two religions; this God Jesus, and then they thought he was talking about this power of anastasis, the resurrection, so they thought Paul was talking almost a polytheistic, or a dualism in religion. It was completely beyond their understanding.

And so, as is often the case, some people decided since they didn't understand it they were going to mock it. Have you ever seen this happen even with Christianity? *'I don't understand it, so I am going to mock it. You believe in the spaghetti monster god.'* That is the term the new Atheists like to use. Or *'You believe in the invisible bogey man.'* Or *'You believe in the big man upstairs.'* They use derisive and small terms to try to describe God. And that is a common response from people who don't want to do the mental discipline of exploring what something really means.

That is what happened here. They called Paul a babbler. Now babbler is an interesting word if you do a Greek word study. It means 'picker of seeds' or 'to pick at seeds.' And if you are a country boy like I am, you probably remember when you went out to the chicken yard and threw a handful of grain on the ground how the chickens would all come running and they would pick, pick, pick at the grain. If you were raised in the city you might have gone to the park and thrown out bird seed to watch the pigeons come running over to pick at the seed. So that gives you an idea of the word 'babblers,' and how people pick at ideas that someone else has scattered.

When they called someone a babbler what they were saying was, *'These aren't even your own ideas. You are a phoney and a fraud. You are just picking an idea from this religion and that religion, and this faith, and that philosopher, and you are combining them all together and presenting them like your own. You are a babblers; you are a seed picker.'* And that was a very derisive term they called Paul. Now some were mockers but there were others who would say, *'No, no, no, we like dialogue. We like*

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

*debate. We like conversation. We like to explore ideas. We are open-minded. Let us hear what he thinks.'*

And I can relate to both of these because I can be really sarcastic as that is my spiritual love language. And when someone kind of gives me some stuff like that I can be like, 'Yeah, right.' So there is a part of me that can relate to that. And then there is a part of me that likes to debate with someone until their ears bleed just because I like to debate. Sometimes I debate things I don't even believe in just because it is entertaining, and that is why God created Facebook. Right? *(Laughter.)*

So Paul comes to Athens, and he preaches to these different groups of people and they are confused. One of the groups invited Paul to the council of the Areopagus. By the way areo means 'mars', the planet Mars, and pagus means 'hill' so this is where they get the term Mars Hill. And there is actually a Mars Hill up in North Carolina, so it is not an unusual term. There was a council of the Areopagus, and they were like all the intellectual, philosophical people of the day. They would gather together, and they just would try and impress each other with their speeches and their debates. They would meet in this special kind of hall or area. There were about 500 in this council and they invited Paul to come and talk to them.

Now I have given you all of that so that when we read this Scripture it will make sense to you. So let's read the Scripture and I think it will pop out for you a little bit better. Let's begin in Acts Chapter 17 and verse 16. "***Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him.***" Let me just pause here a second because I can't pass that word up either. The idea of provocation is important. Here it doesn't mean it made Paul angry; it just made him unsettled. It made him feel as though he had to do something about this.

And we need to understand that we live in similar times as this. Everywhere you turn there is going to be a false message being given. I am to the point of hating to watch television, or going to the movies, because there is always a message that they are trying to get across that ninety-nine times out of hundred I disagree with. And it creates angst in me. I can't even take my grandkids to go see a Disney movie without getting preached at by a philosophy with which I fundamentally disagree. What is it doing? It is provoking my spirit.

I would say this to you, if you are a Christ follower, you are studying the Word of God, and you don't live with a constant tension between the message of the world and the message of the gospel, there is something wrong and you need to get deeper in the Word. A Biblical worldview is going to create within you a provocation of spirit that says, 'I

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

*can't abide by lies, there is too much at stake. I can't abide by false teaching and unsound philosophy. I cannot listen to this and just be expected to swallow it.'*

And in our politically correct world where everyone gets to give their version of the truth it ought to scream to those of us who believe God's Word is truth and that you can't have it both ways. There is an absolute truth, it is not everybody gets to be right, and we need to discuss it, we need to put it in the marketplace, we need to share it. It is a provocation that calls people to Mars Hill. It is a provocation that calls us to the front of the stage and to say, *'I hear what you are saying, but let me have you consider this. Let me show you another way.'*

And that was how Paul's spirit was provoked during his visit in Athens as he was walking through this great city of intellect, philosophy, science and art, and as he saw the city was full of idols. ***"So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews, and the devout persons."*** Those were his people and they spoke a common language. He knew what the practicing Jews believed and he could talk to them at their level. Next Paul went to the marketplace, ***"And in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there."*** Everybody has to go to the marketplace. We all have to go to Walmart and Harris Teeter and Publix. Right? So Paul was down there too. In other words he was going to be with his people and he was going to be with other people.

Now look at where Paul goes next. ***"Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him."*** These were the people who were probably a little intimidating. These were the people who would have been a little bit out of his comfort zone. These were the elites, and they had heard about Paul. ***"And some said, 'What does this babbler wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities' - because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him,"*** (now it wasn't by force but they brought him), ***"to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.'*** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there," (because this is a metropolitan international city,) ***would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new."*** So the people who went to the Areopagus were the ones who would just hang out and talk, talk, talk about all these ideas. Now look in verse 22.

***"So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an alter with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.'*** Now I just have to pause here and talk about this. The first thing I want you to notice is this - Paul walks up before this body of all these thinkers and leaders and

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

elites, and the first thing he does is give them a compliment. Stop and think about that. He says, *‘Look, I have just been visiting your beautiful city. I have walked the streets. I have seen the art, the statues and the temples. What an amazing place this is. But you know I could not help but draw this conclusion - you guys take your religion very seriously.’*

He didn’t beat them between the eyes with a scroll of Old Testament prophets. He didn’t hammer them with his superior rhetorical skills. He didn’t insult them for their flawed thinking. Instead he looked for a point of common ground. He said, *‘You guys seem to take religion seriously.’* And by implication he was saying, *‘And you know what - so do I.’* This is an important thing as we study apologetics, because sometimes apologetics will make us just a little obnoxious. We have all this information, we have all these great arguments, and we sit there with our Facebook open and we are ready to rock and roll. We are ready to get people told. We have persuasive attitude. We have Frank Turek on one side and Norman Geisler on the other and we are going to give these people the facts.

And the bottom line is that will turn people off. They don’t care what we know until they know how much we care. And there ought to be a moment in time where we relate to them on a personal level. And Paul, as he stood before them, he realized that he was a guest in their house. They had invited him to speak and maybe the best thing a guest can do is start off with a compliment. And that is what he did.

Next this cracks me up, because I think they get Paul a little bit, and Paul likes a little sarcasm every once in a while. He says, *“I see you take religion very seriously because as I was walking through the streets I noticed a plaque and an altar. And I saw that you had all your bases covered, guys, because in case you left anyone out you even had one to the unknown god. Just in case all of these others all over the hills of Athens didn’t include this one, you didn’t want to insult it, so you even have one for the god anonymous, the god we slipped up and forgot. So that one was just in case you missed one.”* And I sense a little humor here from Paul, a little sarcasm as he told them how they had every base covered.

Now I want you to notice Paul shifting gears. He has baited his hook, he has complimented them a little bit, and now he says in verse 23: ***“What therefore you worship as unknown.”*** He is ready to tell them that he has news for them today; he is ready to introduce them to their unknown god. ***“This I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And***

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

*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, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us, for.”*

Now he is going to quote Scripture and poetry: *“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.’* Have you ever heard anyone say, *‘We are all God’s children?’* *“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. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, 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.”* Who is that man? That is Jesus Christ.

Now let’s look at this sermon because I want you to see it for the great sermon, the great declaration, and the great apologetic that it was. Paul was standing in front of this elite group, the council of the Areopagus, and he was saying, *‘You all are confused. My goodness, I have walked through your streets and you have gods and temples and statues and facades and places for worship everywhere I turn. And in case you missed one you even have one for the one you overlooked. Guys, I need to tell you something, you wanted to know what I believe. I am going to tell you.’*

And then without apology, without any kind of hesitation, he declared the gospel to all who would listen point blank. Not offensively, but with absolute clarity, he said to the confused, *‘Meet my God.’* And he gave them the gospel. He told them to take it as they wished, to consider it, because he was not going to water it down but give it to them straight. And he told them about the God they had missed. Here is the God they didn’t know about. Here is the God they realized was there but they didn’t know Him. And he wanted to introduce them to Him. And in that Paul declared for all people to hear that this was the gospel.

Now let me just break this down very quickly, we are going to look at their response, and then I am going to tell you how we can apply it. Here is the message in six concise points: Point one - God is great and He created it all. That is found in verse 24. He made this declaration and this is the apologetic. This deals with time, origins, design and natural law. He said there is a God unlike Poseidon; there is a God unlike Apollos; there is a God unlike Zeus; there is a God unlike Aphrodite; there is a God unlike any that you have named and those you don’t even name. There is a God and He is THE GOD.

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

He is the designer, the creator, the original; He is the one you need to be paying attention to.

He said God is great. Then in verse 25 he expands on that and he says not only is He great but He is good. He has provided for us. So in verse 24 he makes sure that they know He is not served by human hands and He doesn't need anything; instead what He does is He gives to all mankind. He gives life, He gives breath and He gives everything else to mankind. He is a giver and not a taker. He is a giver because He is the creator. He is a giver because He is great, and He is a giver because He is good. He sustains us, He keeps us, He provides for us and He protects us. That was Paul's second point.

Then Paul goes on to verses 26 and 27 for point three. He says make no mistake there is something about Him that you need to understand and that is He is in charge. He established government, He established nations, He established countries and He established us. He gave us order. He created the civilization. He created all those institutions that they thought were unique to them and their way of thinking and they need to understand God set it all in order. God put it all in place.

Paul goes on to point four, and he says they need to understand that God did not do this haphazardly; He had a plan. We see in verses 28 and 29 Paul said this: "***In Him we live and move and have our being.***" Being means our purpose, our design, our reason for existence. He said even some of their own poets have said you are His children and He is your Father and He created you. And if He created you He created you for a purpose because every designer has intention when they make a design. And when you see the evidence of design, you have to ask the question - who is the designer and what was his intention? This was Paul's great apologetic for them. He told them that God had a plan for them; they were not here because of some kind of cosmic fluke. They were not here because of some kind of haphazard being. They didn't need to worry about a plethora of gods; what they have is one God who is the creator, the good one, the great one, the provider, the one who has a plan for them. And they didn't need to live wondering why they were here, why they exist, and where they were going because He has the plan.

But then Paul gives them caution in the verses 30 and 31. He tells them that as much as God is our planner, as much as He is our designer, as much as He is good and great, they better also know that He is their judge. He is our judge and He will hold us accountable. Paul explains to them the idea that in times of ignorance God was always willing to overlook, but now His plan is in place, it is complete, and He now has a demand - and that is to repent. They need to quit trying to save themselves, quit trying to create their own systems, quit trying to follow their own gods - and repent.

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

Now that is a word we don't like to use in 2019, is it? Because then we have to admit we are sinners. We have to admit there is absolute truth. We have to admit there is absolutely a right and a wrong. And most people don't want anyone telling them that today. They can talk about their truth as if there are many truths, but there is not. There is one truth and it is the capital T truth that is found in the person of Jesus Christ and the written Word of God. ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me."*** That is the very declaration of God Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

There is but one truth. Now you can believe there are other truths, but that doesn't in any way change the fact that there is one truth that matters. We can't all be truth; we can't all be right; there are not many paths any more than there are many gods. This was Paul's message, and we can hear the clarity to the confused, and it draws them in. And many believed that this man was certain, and that he knew his God; this man had thought it through. And Paul told them that his God was not like any of their other gods. He was a God like no other and here is why - His God conquered death. His God sent a man and that man died and was resurrected.

Now we have the condensed version of Paul's sermon. We don't know whether this was the whole thing, or whether he used this as his basis and then taught a series of lectures afterwards in which he explained it all. We just know what we have here recorded in Scripture. I am very confident that this conversation continued for hours and hours and hours, while we can read what is here in about three minutes. But I am sure that this conversation went far longer than three minutes as Paul explained the miracle of the Son of God who died for our sins so that we can have eternal life, and then He was resurrected. And that is what distinguished Paul's God from Apollos, from Poseidon, from Zeus, from Aphrodite and from all the other cold dead statues that littered the pathways of the city of Athens, because there is no statue for a living God. And in that the gospel was declared.

My goodness, I would just love to stop here and wallow in this for a while. I would just love to just celebrate the clarity and the truth of that message. I wish I could be that concise. And yet we are almost out of time, so I need to give you what you need so you can go study some more on it yourself.

There were three responses that day if you read the rest of the chapter. Some mocked. They absolutely thought this man was out of his ever-loving mind. Some of them said, *'Tell me more. You have intrigued me. This is interesting; can we have an additional conversation?'* And the third response was *'You have convinced me. I believe. I repent, I believe, let's get going.'*

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

And folks, those are the same three responses you and I are going to hear to this very day to the gospel. Some are going to look at us and say, *'How can you worship the giant spaghetti monster god? How can you worship a god you cannot see? How can you worship a god that lets children die of cancer? How can you worship a god that allows a world in which people starve to death? How can you worship a god that tells me it is not okay to live my life the way I want to?'* They will mock you, so don't be surprised when it happens. It is not the first time someone has done that.

Then some will say, *'Wow, can we talk some more? Can we have coffee or lunch? Can I go to church with you? Do you have a book I can read? Would you walk with me on this part of my journey?'* And when that happens it is a great privilege to have. I love walking with people on that journey. There are some people in this room like that right now. You have been coming to this church several times. You and I have even talked a time or two. In fact we are supposed to have coffee sometime but you haven't followed up on it and I am waiting for your call. And if you don't want to do it with me, I know I come on a little strong, I can give you someone who is a lot better looking than me. I promise you I will find somebody you will like to talk to.

We have some wonderful pastors and elders and people in this church, we have men and we have women that would love to talk with you. And if you are pursuing that and you want someone to talk to you about this message, let me tell you we have people available. And we will even buy your coffee. Or you can come over to our house and hang out. We will spend as much time as you want, and you will not get pressured. We are not trying to get you to join anything, but I want you to understand that we would love to share what God has done in our lives, so that you can learn about for your life as well. And I think if you will explore this, you will be convinced.

Then there are some people that are saying, *'It makes sense. I got it. The light is on. This is clarity. This is what I have been searching for. I'm ready to go.'* And for you, if you have not had that time in your life where you have repented of your sins and trusted Christ as your Savior, please don't go home today until you have done it. Seriously, don't do that. Do it today, because that is what God would have for you.

Now for the rest of us, what do we do? Where do we go with this message from Mars Hill? Where do I go with the example of Paul? Let me give you a couple of quick thoughts. Number one - you and I need to seek out the darkest places of unbelief we can find and light the fire of truth. That is what we need to do. I don't know where your dark place is that you sometimes visit, it might be work, it might be your neighborhood, it might be your house. It might be when you go home to family that lives in another city. It might be a club that you are a member of, or in your neighborhood. I don't know

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

where the place is that needs the light of the gospel that you carry, but I do know the Holy Spirit will tell you where it is. For Paul it was Mars Hill. And for Paul it would later be a prison cell. For Paul it would be as he ran out of town. For Paul it would be in a synagogue. For Paul it would be in a marketplace. For Paul it was a lot of places. And for some of us it is a lot of places; but for all of us some places are dark places that we are supposed to go light that fire in. And the question is - have you done it?

And by the way, you don't have to be an intellectual or a college professor, you don't have to be trained in the ways of the Sanhedrin like Paul was. You can just simply be a gospel witness that says, *'Let me tell you something that Jesus did in my life. May I share it with you?'* It could be that you are a coach, it could be that you are a teacher, it could be that you are a mechanic, it could be that you are an inventor, or a software designer. It could be that you are wealthy or you are poor. It could be that you are black or white or male or female. It really doesn't matter, but if God has meant something in your heart and your life then you have the light of the gospel. My question is - are you willing to share it with someone? You don't have to stand in front of the council of 500; you may stand in the presence of the one that is just willing to listen.

The second thing is this - we should keep the focus on God and the gospel. There are a lot of people that want to drag a whole bunch of garbage and debris into the gospel. They want to know about politics, they want to know about money, and they want to know about this and about that. But Paul said, *'You know what, let me just tell you about God.'* And if someone says, *'Yeah, but I know a hypocrite.'* Then your reply can be: *'Yeah, I know a hypocrite too, but let me tell you about God.'*

*'Yeah, but God is not a democrat.'* And you can reply, *'Yeah, I know there is a political mess in this country, but let me tell you about God.'* *'Yeah, but I knew this Catholic guy, and what about the priest?'* And you can answer: *'Yeah, I have heard stories too, but let me tell you about God.'* Just keep going back to the gospel. Just keep going back to the truth. Just go back to the Word of God, because that is where the power of salvation is. That is where we need to focus.

The third thing is this - we need to remember that false faith and ideas are temporary but truth is eternal. False ideas and false faith are temporary, but the truth is eternal. ***"Forever, oh Lord, thy word is settled in Heaven."*** It is settled. You may hear about all kinds of new thoughts and new happenings, and if we investigate them we will find that they are just tired relics of the lies on which they were built. One night I was in Rome by myself when I was about 32 years old and I had never been there before. I am from Missouri and I was confused. I was hungry and I wanted to find some Roman

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

spaghetti or a Roman pizza, and I got lost in Rome. This was way before Siri and she probably wouldn't have been any help anyway.

So I am so lost, and I am just walking around not even sure how to get back to my hotel. I sit down in front of this enormous building at a little sidewalk café, and I looked up at the waiter as he was taking my order. I asked him what the big building was in front of me and he looked at me like I had three heads. The condescension just dripped from him and he said, *'Sir, that is the Pantheon.'*

I found out later that it was one of the most famous buildings in the entire world, the place where they worshipped all kinds of pagan gods, and it was thousands of years old. And you know what - it is just a building, because buildings built on lies fall apart, but the building that God built is not one built by human hands; it is His body, it is His bride, it is His church, the body of believers. And folks, that is real, that is eternal, that is what matters, and we need to keep focused on that.

The fourth thing is this - we are called to clarity in the midst of spiritual confusion. You are going to have people that will constantly do their best to confuse you away from the truth you believe. High school kids listen to me, I am so proud of some of our high school kids as I hear stories about you, and I know you have pressure on you while old guys like me don't have that kind of pressure. At this stage in my life people don't care about trying to convince me of something, but they want to convince you because you have the rest of your life ahead of you.

You high schoolers who go to public school, and you college kids may have teachers and professors that may mock your faith. And I believe that you are going to stand up and not be mocked of your belief. And when you stand up, because that is the right thing to do, when you stay up for the faith, you give courage to others who may be wavering in their faith. I thank God for the strong young men and women in this church who have said, *'I will not sit passively by and let someone denigrate my Savior just because they are behind a lectern. I will speak up for my faith.'*

I thank God for you young people. (*Applause.*) You don't have to be ugly and you don't have to be disrespectful, but neither do you have to be silent. And I urge you to stand up with conviction. You will feel good about it, and others will be drawn to you, and will ask you why you are willing to speak up for that. We need people at work, we need people in their communities, in their neighborhoods, and in their clubs who are willing to say, *'I believe. And I will not back down, or be ashamed.'*

The last thing is this - we are not responsible for the outcomes, we are only responsible that we obey. The fact is Paul's job that day was to preach the gospel. It

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

wasn't to change the minds of Athenians; it was not to sway the council of the Areopagus; it was not to change the course of human history. His job that day was to preach Jesus, Son of God, designed for our redemption, murdered, buried, resurrected, and when we repent we have our salvation through Him. That was Paul's message. It was the gospel message. Whether no one listened, or everyone listened, Paul's task was just to obey.

Satan would like to convince you in whatever way possible to fall silent rather than to obey. And may I urge all of us as we close out this series of 2019, where we have talked about 'It's Not About Us,' and we have talked about spreading the gospel. We have talked about 'Going Viral,' we have talked about The Great Commission, we have talked about planting churches, we have talked about discipleship, we have talked about standing firm, we have talked about witnessing in our communities, and have we talked about reaching our neighborhoods. And in all of that may I ask you to continue walking forward in obedience as ambassadors of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is what He has called us to do. And in a world of confusion, in a world of chaos, in a world of pressure, may we link arms and look at those who are confused and say, '*Meet my God.*' We have His Word, we have His spirit, and all He asks of us is our obedience.

Our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed. We have finished this series this morning, and we have finished this message. But my question is - is the Holy Spirit finished with you? What is it that He would have you to do in response to the teaching of His Word? I have done my job, the Holy Spirit is doing His job, the question is - will you do what He has asked you to do? It may be saying '*I repent. Today I want to trust Christ.*' In a moment we are going to stand and sing two final songs and then we are going to be done for the day.

I am going to be standing over here to your right, and if you want to trust Christ as your Savior, to become part of the family of God, why don't you come over and take me by the hand. I will ask someone to show you from the Bible what it means to be part of God's family. There will be no stress and no pressure; we just want you to know that. You can walk out of here and be as sure of anything in your life that you are going to Heaven when you die.

Maybe you don't want to come forward because it makes you uncomfortable or nervous, then you can just slip out of the back, and go right in the lobby all the way to the Prayer Room. There will be someone standing there who will be glad to very privately show you from the Bible what it means to be a Christ follower. Maybe you don't know if you are ready today, that is not a problem, we will just pray with you then. We will answer your questions, we will give you a Bible if you want one, and we will just

**A MESSAGE TO THE CONFUSED**  
**ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US**  
**Dan Burrell**

---

encourage you. We love you, and we are glad you are here. We have all been on this journey before, so there is nothing you can say to us that will surprise us.

There is also another place you can go, and that is the Next Step Station and you will see it as you go out. Maybe you need a pastor, an elder, or a friend to call you because you have questions, and they will take your name and phone number and someone will call you later this week. Very discreetly and very quietly we will follow up with you. But whatever you do, if you feel the Holy Spirit calling you in your heart this morning, don't walk out. That is God and He is literally talking to you. So please don't walk out today but take advantage of this opportunity.

Maybe you have trusted Christ but you just need to reconnect with Him and be close to Him after being reminded of what He has done for you. Maybe some of you want to take communion, and it is available in the back and in the front. You can come by yourself, or with your family, and take communion. Maybe you want someone to pray with you. The Prayer Room is open, I will be over here, and if you have something going on in your life and need prayer, please don't hesitate to do that. God hears our prayers, and we want that for you.

Or if you prefer to pray by yourself there are crosses at the front. Just come up here and ask the Lord to do something in your heart. Whatever your need is during these next two songs, ask God to speak to you on what He wants you to do. He has called you now - will you obey?

*Father, we love you. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for the hope you have given us. Thank you, Father, for Paul's message, and I pray, Father, that not only would we heed it, but help us to share it. Help others to meet this God that we know and love. Father, help us to be faithful in that calling. For it is in Christ's name I pray. Amen.*