

## cts 14:8-18 (WCF 1:1) "Mistaken Identity"

**For the Children:** Many people today make the mistake of thinking that there is no God. Others believe in a false god. But there is only one Creator and Ruler of this world – the God of the Bible. Deep down, everyone knows this. But they don't want to admit it. If they admit it, they will have to serve the true God – and they don't want to have to make such a big sacrifice. They need to hear from God's Word that God is their Creator and Ruler. But they also need to hear that the only way of salvation is through the Lord Jesus. **Questions:** What are general revelation and special revelation? What kind of truths does each one teach? What do we learn about God's patience from the way He deals with the world?

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### Introduction:

#### First Point: The Witness of General Revelation

- 1) An Issue to Raise with Pagans: Paul raises the issue of general revelation precisely because it is "general" – creation and acts of Providence and history are observed by all. Pagans, however, are often not familiar with special revelation.
- 2) Creation and Providence: In v. 15 the apostle proclaims that God made everything we see around us. He makes the same point in Acts 17:24-26 – also addressing pagans. In v. 17 the apostle proclaims the Providence of God – His good and satisfying gifts which the Gentiles also receive. See also Acts 17:25-26.
- 3) What General Revelation Teaches about God: Creation, Providence and history demonstrate that God is all-powerful, all-wise and good (WCF 1:1); that He exists, is just and merciful. However, the wicked do not allow themselves to acknowledge these truths, even though they are aware of them at some deep level – they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Because they sense these truths, they are rendered inexcusable for refusing to act on the truth (Rom. 1:20).
- 4) What General Revelation Does Not Teach: General revelation does not teach the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Nor does it empower men to break free of their sin. The wicked therefore use creation and Providence as an excuse to go further into idolatry – as we see in vss 11-15, where the Lystrans worshipped "vain things." See also 17:29 and Rom. 1:21-23.
- 5) God's Patience: In view of all this suppression of truth and idolatry, it is all the more remarkable that the Lord continues to give good gifts to the wicked. Creation and providence therefore bear witness to His patience (v. 16, with 17:30 and 2 Pet. 3:9).

#### Second Point: The Witness of Special Revelation

- 1) Special Revelation Interprets General Revelation: Some have taken the mention of "the light of nature" in WCF 1:1 to mean that unbelievers can find God through general revelation alone. However, the article states that general revelation is NOT sufficient to give the knowledge of God": special revelation is *necessary* for that. Hence, the apostle interprets general revelation by God's Word (v.15). He even quotes from verses like Ex. 20:1, Ps. 146:6.
- 2) The Gospel Proclaimed: In dealing with pagans, the apostle makes sure that the Gospel is proclaimed, not just the things we learn from general revelation. (14:7,9). Even the healing of the lame man is a sign of the nature of Christ's kingdom – a kingdom where the Lord heals body and soul from sin and misery.
- 3) The Call to Repentance: In addition, the apostle calls the Lystrans to repentance when they mistake Barnabas and Paul for the false gods Zeus and Hermes. He calls upon them to turn from vain things to the Living God, according to the same Gospel. These are special revelation matters.
- 4) How We Apply This Approach: When dealing with rank unbelievers, we do well to appeal to general revelation, but we must include the Gospel and a call to repentance according to what we learn from special revelation. We can stress the point about all men being inexcusable. Therefore they need the Lord Jesus Christ if they would be saved.

### Conclusion: