

Transforming Daily
“... new doctrine ...”
Acts 17:19

Paul traveled into an area where the people loved to learn and study new knowledge all the time. They had heard many things from many people about a lot of stuff, but they had never heard what Paul was speaking. At first they were resistant to his message, but eventually they gave ear up to a point. They wanted to hear about his perspective on God, but when Paul started in on the gospel, as usual, the people turned tail and ran. In this case, most of them did run, but some of them followed after Paul, asked to hear more, and subsequently came to faith.

This story reveals to the reader that these people loved “to tell or to hear a new thing” (v.21). That’s what the love for knowledge without purpose will lead to. Knowledge in and of itself is not the goal of man’s endeavors, especially as it pertains to one’s life in Christ. The Bible says that the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord, “but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7) particularly from God’s Word. The problem with these people in Athens is that they had so many God’s that they didn’t believe anything with absolute assurance. As a matter of fact, they even had a designation for the “Unknown god.” They wanted to make sure that they covered all of the bases, just in case they didn’t have the truth; whatever that was to them.

Things have not changed much through the centuries. People today love information. We have all of the bases covered technologically. Cell phone, email, text messaging, instant messaging, land line, snail mail, air mail, telegraph, radio, internet, news paper, magazines, television, microwave, and satellite transmission are just a few of the common venues through which information comes (there are other types of communication devices to disseminate information, but I’m certain that if we found out about them, they would have to kill us). The point is people love information. There’s even an old axiom that says, “Knowledge is power.”

But there are some things more important to know than others. For instance, it isn’t as important to know if there is a God Who can create a rock too heavy for Him to lift, than it is to know that God personally through Jesus Christ. It isn’t as important to know where heaven is, as it is to know how and if you will spend eternity there. It isn’t as important to know how God performs a miracle as it is to know and believe that He can, has, and does. My brother often says, “Too much analysis brings paralysis.” He isn’t saying not to be a good student or not to love knowledge, but that knowledge for knowledge’s sake, that is information for information’s sake, can hinder a credible, deliberate, heartfelt, committed response.

The “new doctrine” that the Athenians referred to was actually perhaps only new to them. The Old Testament has been preaching and teaching Christ for hundreds of years prior to them. There was a willful disobedience associated with their idolatry. Perhaps it was passed down to them from their parents to the third and fourth generations. They willfully chose to be polytheists. They knew in their hearts that there is only one God; that’s why they had a name tag for Him, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.”

How about you? Do you love knowledge for knowledge sake? Are you personally related to God through Jesus Christ? Are you careful what you put into your heart and mind? Or are you always on a quest for some new doctrine?