

Commentary on Acts chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 5.7.23

Pastor John Donovan, cell phone 508-380-0471

Pastor Terry Gerlarneau, cell phone 603-455-4399

Web site todbc.org email us at opendoorbiblechurch@todbc.org

May memory verse Psalm 119:105 (KJV) Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

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Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews ([Act 17:1](#)):

Now Luke passes that off in one verse. From Philippi to Amphipolis was thirty miles. Another thirty miles on to Apollonia. And another thirty-seven miles on to Thessalonica. So it, no doubt, took them several days to travel almost a hundred miles to Thessalonica.

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them [that is into the synagogue], and reasoned them for three sabbath days out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ [that is the Messiah] must needs to have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is the Messiah ([Act 17:2-3](#)).

Now Paul took their scriptures and out of their scriptures he pointed out and showed to them the necessity of the Messiah dying. No doubt he was using [Isaiah 53](#) as his text and [Psalm 22](#) and the other scriptures where there is that type of the death of Christ. And so he was reasoning to them out of their own scriptures, showing them what the Messiah needed to suffer and die. And Jesus, the one we are preaching to you, is the Messiah.

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude ([Act 17:4](#)),

So some of the Jews believed, but a great multitude of the Greeks and of the chief women not a few. A very strong church was established at Thessalonica. And for super extra credit you can read Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonians, which grew out of this ministry. And, of course, if you will read the epistles in conjunction with your reading of Acts, it really begins to put it together, and you begin to really tie the scriptures together, and it's a very helpful thing.

But the Jews which believed not, were moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come here also ([Act 17:5-6](#));

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I like the charges that were made against Paul and Silas. Earlier the charges were made against Peter by the high priest that he had filled the city of Jerusalem with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. What a glorious charge! Oh, that we could be arrested in that charge made against us. We have filled Orange County with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. How I wish I could say guilty as charged. That would be great!

Now Jason has received them into his house: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, a fellow by the way of Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason ([Act 17:7-9](#)),

That is, Jason had to post bail.

and of the others, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming there went into the synagogue of the Jews ([Act 17:9-10](#)).

Those guys just don't quit, do they?

Now those in Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so ([Act 17:11](#)).

In Thessalonica Paul reasoned with them for three weeks. When Paul came to Berea he began to reason with these people, but they were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They went home and did their homework. They went home and studied the scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true.

I strongly encourage that. I have heard more junky garbage on television being passed off for doctrine by some of these evangelists that it's just disheartening. For people take some of these weird, far out ideas that these guys say and they just run with them. They don't search the scriptures to see if it be so. Because a lot of things are being proclaimed as scriptural which are not scriptural.

Be like the Bereans, more noble than they of Thessalonica. Go home and search the scriptures and prove all things and hold fast that which is good. And I encourage you, don't just take what I say. Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.

Therefore many of them believed ([Act 17:12](#));

Why? Because they searched the scriptures and saw that it was so. They saw the scriptures were confirming.

also of honorable women who were Greeks, and of men, not a few ([Act 17:12](#)).

Again, a good work was established in Berea.

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But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and received a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed ([Act 17:13-15](#)).

So these brethren brought Paul, they accompanied him down to Athens while Timothy and Silas continued there in Berea to strengthen the brethren. But when Paul came to Athens, he said to these fellows that brought him down, "When you get back, tell Timothy and Silas to get here in a hurry." So they left Paul in Athens.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred ([Act 17:16](#)),

Provoked, literally.

as he saw a city wholly given over to idolatry ([Act 17:16](#)).

It would be the feeling that you would get perhaps in going to portions of Hollywood or San Francisco. When you see an area given over completely to sensual lust. It just provoked him. He was stirred inside.

Therefore he disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him ([Act 17:17](#)).

So Paul started meeting in the market daily with a group of fellas and started sharing the truth about Jesus Christ.

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him ([Act 17:18](#)).

Epicurus actually lived from 342 to 271 B.C. This was happening in 53 A.D. So it had been over 300 years since the death of Epicurus. And in this period of time, his philosophy had degenerated. Originally, Epicurus said that the chief good was pleasure. But he went beyond that. He declared that pleasure came from a simple life. That the more complex our lives become, the more we have to bother with the details. The more possessions we have, the more we have to worry about taking care of them. So if a man can just live a very simple life, that is the key to pleasure, and pleasure is the chief good.

But the simplicity of life. But that is not the way the Epicurean philosophy was now being interpreted. By this time, they had said the chief good of life was pleasure, thus you are to pursue after pleasure above everything else. And as the result, they had given themselves over to sensual lust.

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The Epicurean philosophy was expressed in the Roman orgies where you would eat at these feasts all that you could hold of the first course. Savoring and enjoying every bite. And then between courses go out and forcefully regurgitate so you could eat all that you could hold at the second course. And eating for the pleasure of eating. And seeking to measure the intensity of pleasure each taste brought to you. So they were busy measuring degrees and intensity of pleasure.

This degrading of the Epicurean philosophy ended in pantheism, the worship of everything, anything. The Stoics said that the chief good was virtue. But a man cannot know virtue who is emotionally involved. Therefore, you are not to have feelings, and they sought to become totally unfeeling. To not feel pain, not feel grief, not feel joy, not feel anything, to just be stoic about everything, untouched, unmoved in your emotions about anything. And this led to an atheism. These are the two philosophies that Paul encountered in Athens.

And some said, What will this babbling say? [The word babbling in Greek is seed picker or cotton picker.] and other said, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he is preaching about Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof you speak, is? For you are bringing certain strange things to our ears: we would like to know what these things mean. (For all the Athenians, and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.) ([Act 17:18-21](#))

The Athenians, not committed, just want to listen to anything novel and new.

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill ([Act 17:22](#)),

Areopagus is about, oh half way up from the Agura marketplace, to the acropolis, the top of the hill where stands the Parthenon. And almost up to the Parthenon, maybe two thirds of the way up is this outcropping of rock where was known the stone of impudence, where men would go to espouse their philosophies and all their ideas. And these guys would sit around in their robes, and here's the Parthenon above them and the Agura below them and all and there they're getting into all these philosophical debates and discussions and all. And so Paul is sitting on this stone of impudence and there, "Give your spiel."

So Paul said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious ([Act 17:22](#)).

Now the words too superstitious are a poor translation. The American Authorized has a better translation. It translates it, "You are very religious." Paul was not insulting these fellas to begin his speech. That's no way to persuade people. And Paul was going to try to persuade them to his belief in Jesus Christ. And so he said, "I perceive that you are very religious." Which indeed was evidenced in the city of Athens.

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There were travelers to the city of Athens who said there were more gods than people in the city. That every street corner had its god and then along the block there were all of these gods. Marble, silver, gold, carved images, idols that were worshipped by the people. Many great temples, which some of them the ruins still stand as magnificent wonders today.

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions ([Act 17:23](#)),

Watching these people stop and pray to these various gods. It's always interesting to watch the devotions of people. I find it fascinating. In Mexico I find it fascinating to see the veneration that is given to the saints where the mummies and all are in these caskets in the cathedrals. And to watch the people coming on their knees and crying and weeping as they're praying to this saint for some miracle to take place. I find it interesting to watch the Muslims wash their feet, get out their little rugs, and bow towards the East. And Paul was observing their devotions and he said,

I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD ([Act 17:23](#)).

Now the Greeks had deified just about everything they could think of. They had deified the forces of nature, they had deified the various emotions of man, they had deified various concepts. There was the god of the arts, the god of the carpenters, the god of the masons, and gods for everything. The god of war, the god of peace, the god of love, the god of hate, the god of jealousy, the god of anger. Gods for everything.

And some fellow, no doubt, though, "Well, we may have forgotten one and it would be a shame to slight one of them. He might get angry with us, so why don't we build an altar to him? And since we don't know him, we'll just inscribe it to the unknown god just so we're not slighting him in getting angry with us." And Paul said, "I saw this altar with the inscription to the unknown god."

Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you ([Act 17:23](#)).

Interesting how Paul begins right where they are. "You're very religious people. I've observed that. I passed by this one little altar to the unknown god. That's the God I'd like to talk to you about." And what did he tell them about the unknown God? He said, "You worship Him ignorantly."

How many people today are still worshipping God in ignorance? You remember Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" ([John 4:24](#)). But men are still worshipping Him ignorantly.

God that made the world and all things therein ([Act 17:24](#)),

He is not a creation of man; He is the Creator of man. He is not made of marble or gold or silver or things found in the earth. He created these things. He is vastly superior to the gods that you are worshipping, for He is the Creator. Oh, that people would realize

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that today. You see, I would say that though the polls show that the majority of the people in the United States believe in God, I would dare venture that though the majority of the people in the United States may believe in God, the majority of the people in the United States worship materialism. Now, they may believe in God, but they don't worship God. They worship the creation of man, the created things by man rather than worshipping God. And so the unknown God, whom you are ignorantly worshipping is the one that made the world and everything that is in it.

seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth ([Act 17:24](#)),

This unknown God rules over all. He is the Lord over the heaven and the earth.

He doesn't dwell in temples made with hands ([Act 17:24](#));

Directly below Paul from Mars' Hill, at that end of the Agura, was a thesium That glorious Doric temple that still stands pretty much in tact today as a magnificent demonstration of the perfection of architecture. At the far end of the Agura, a block and a half, two blocks away, that great temple to Juneau which ruins are still pretty much in tact today. Above Paul there in the Parth, that great temple to the Athena the goddess, and those marvelous temple structures there on the Acropolis. Paul said, "God, the unknown God, He doesn't dwell in these temples."

It is interesting when Solomon built a temple for God, that as Solomon dedicated the temple, he said, "Oh, God, we know that the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. We understand how that You fill the universe. So we haven't really built this for You to dwell in." In other words, it isn't that God is going to dwell here exclusive of someplace else. He dwells in the universe. He fills the universe. "The heavens of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this house that I have built. But God, meet us at this place. Let this be the place where we can come and meet You."

We, all of us, in a measure are guilty of thinking of God in a locality as being more in one place than another. Like truly God must be more here tonight than He is the bar down the street. Not so. God is just as much in the bar down the street as He is here. We can't escape the presence of God. No matter where you are, you're surrounded by Him. And God is never limited to locality.

Neither is he worshipped with man's hands ([Act 17:25](#)),

Or with man's handiwork. He isn't worshipped through idols. He isn't worshipped through images. Not all of the churches believe that today, do they? And yet, this is what Paul is declaring. He's not worshipped with ornate altars overlaid with gold. He's not worshipped in fancy buildings. Careful, that cost eighteen million dollars. You can worship God out there under that tree. You can worship God beside your bed at home. You can worship God sitting at the kitchen table. You can worship God sitting on the sand at the beach. In fact, I find sitting on the sand at the beach a very great environment to worship God. He isn't worshipped by the works of man's hands.

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as though he needed any thing ([Act 17:25](#)),

As though God needed from me to give Him something. What a ridiculous idea. "Oh, Chuck, I need for you to really give to me this week because I'm almost broke. And my program won't be able to go on another week unless you bail me out, Chuck, and help me out. Please! I'm desperate! I know I've sent letters like this before, but this time I mean it!" As though He needed anything.

What can I give to God that He needs? That is the biggest problem. What do you give to someone who's got everything? David said, "What shall I render unto God for all His benefits toward me?" ([Psalm 116:12](#)) And you know what he decided he could do? The only thing I can render unto God is just to pray. I'll call upon the name of the Lord. There's nothing I can give to God that He needs. As though He needed anything. He's complete. My giving to God doesn't really benefit God; it benefits me.

I'm the one who benefited by my giving my life to God; God didn't benefit by that. So many times we want to make a big deal about our gifts to God. You know, we want men to say, "Oh, aren't you marvelous. What you gave to God. That's so glorious." And we have that kind of a mentality developed of exalting the man who has given to God, as though God needed something. As though He needed anything.

seeing he giveth ([Act 17:25](#)),

It's not what I give to God; it's what God has given to me. That's what's glorious.

for he has given to all life, and breath, and all things ([Act 17:25](#));

So our emphasis should not be on what we should be giving to God, but the emphasis should be on what God has given to us. And the ministry should not be emphasizing what you should do for God; we should be emphasizing what God has done for you. What can you do for God?

We're so weak in these areas, and yet, we hear that as the constant emphasis in ministry. "You ought to be doing this; you ought to be doing that. Now get out and do this, brothers; now do that, brothers." And extolling the man who has done it rather than extolling what God has done for us. You see, when I realize what God has done for me then I want to respond to God. We make a tragic mistake in thinking I can do something for God and then God is going to respond to me.

The true praise isn't, you know, "Okay, God, give me now." But the true praise is, "God, You have given so much. How can I thank You? Oh, Lord, You're so good to me." And it is that which arises spontaneously from the recognition of what God has done for me. That's true praise. So we need to know, not what we can do for God, but what God has done for us. And then the love of Christ constrains me and I'm responding to that love. I'm responding to that goodness. I'm responding to those blessings. And my life is so rich, my life is so blessed, my life is so full just trying to respond to God as I'm learning

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more and more the grace and goodness and the love of God that He's bestowed upon my life.

I'm getting to the place where I can hardly take it. I'm going to be translated one of these days soon. God's just going to translate me right into glory. His blessings and His goodness upon my life, so rich, so full. And I just am overflowing as I'm trying to respond to Him. Seeing He has given to all life and breath and all things.

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth ([Act 17:26](#)),

God has made us all one. There's neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, scythian, bond or free, male or female. Jesus is all and in all. He's made us all one.

and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation ([Act 17:26](#));

God sets the limits for our lives. My life is totally bounded by God. He has set the boundaries of my existence. He knew the time of my birth long before my mother ever conceived me. He knows the day of my departing from this tent. He knows the circumstances by which I will depart from this tent. My life is totally bounded by Him.

That they should seek the Lord, if by chance they might feel after him, and find him ([Act 17:27](#)),

You know, a lot of people have sought the Lord on just purely a maybe basis. They really didn't have many promises to hold onto, but just, who can tell? You remember when Jonah preached to the Ninevites. There was no message of repentance. There was no message of hope, no message of grace, no message of salvation. Jonah preached the message of doom and gloom. He said, "Forty days and comes your destruction." And the people all repented in sackcloth and ashes. And they said, "Who can tell? Maybe God will be merciful and spare us." No promise of mercy, but just a maybe, if by chance you might really feel God and find God.

though he be not far from every one of us ([Act 17:27](#)):

And now he deals with the doctrine of the eminence of God--that all-prevailing presence of God everywhere within His universe that David spoke about in the Psalms. "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me" ([Psalm 139:5,7-10](#)). For He is not far from any of you.

For in him we live, and move, and have our being ([Act 17:28](#));

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I am totally surrounded by God. I depend upon God for my very existence. In Him I live. God sustains my life. I'm dependent on Him. I move, wherever I move, He is there. I exist in Him, by Him.

as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring ([Act 17:28](#)).

Now this is found also in the writing of Aelates and Aclenthes, two of the Greek poets, who declared that we are God's offspring. Now Paul affirms that these poets were right.

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device ([Act 17:29](#)).

We are God's offspring. God is not our offspring. We cannot really create our own gods, though man does that. Man is an offspring of God. In the beginning when God created man, He made man in His likeness and after His own image. But man fell, and thus, man is fallen from the image of God. And as we look around today we see man in his fallen state. He was made in the image of God; he was made in the likeness of God, but he has fallen from that.

God made us to be spiritual beings. God made us to live after the Spirit and be ruled by the Spirit. But man fell from that and man followed after the flesh and was ruled by his flesh. And being a body-conscious being, he became as the animal, which is a body-conscious being, and so man looked around for identity and he says, "Oh, there goes my uncle, swinging from that tree!" Because all he thinks about is eating and existing. He has a body-conscious life. And all I need is a place to live and something to eat, you know. And so this body-conscious life, and thus, I relate to the animals. That's wrong. We are God's offspring. And I can never have a satisfactory relationship with the animal kingdom. I must relate to God to find myself. I will never find myself in the animal kingdom. I will only find myself as I am relating again to God.

Now, I was created in the image of God. I fell from that image of God, but Jesus came in order that He might restore me into the image of God as I yield my life to Him. "So beloved, now are we the sons of God. It doesn't yet appear what we're going to be: but we know when he appears, we're going to be like him" ([I John 3:2](#)). For He is restoring us into that image. "For we with open face are beholding the glory of the Lord and we are being changed from glory to glory into the same image" ([II Corinthians 3:18](#)), because the Spirit of God is conforming me into the image of Christ. And thus, through the work of God's Spirit, that which man lost through the fall is being restored to Jesus Christ as man is being restored back into the image of God.

And when the Holy Spirit has completed His work in my life, I will be fully restored back into the image of God, and I will stand in His presence faultless with exceeding joy. So this is God's work. I am God's offspring. The Greek poets recognized that. Therefore, I should not think of God as some lifeless statue that cannot see, that cannot speak, that cannot walk. Made of marble or gold or silver that is standing here on the corner that

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men come by and pray to and bow to and worship. You should not think of God in that term, because you're God's offspring, the living God.

Now in times past God winked at ([Act 17:30](#));

Or overlooked the ignorance. Paul said, "You're worshipping Him ignorantly. And at one time, God overlooked the ignorance of man concerning Himself, but no more."

but now he has commanded all men everywhere to repent ([Act 17:30](#)):

When the revelation of God was limited to the nation of Israel, God overlooked the pagan's ignorance of Himself. But no longer will God overlook man's ignorance. You have no excuse to be ignorant of God. The agnostic has no excuse for his position. God is knowable. It is just he doesn't want to know God or he rejects God's revelation of Himself. But God is knowable, and a position of an agnostic is not an intelligent position. For no man of true intelligence can rest in ignorance. And the word agnostic in Greek translated into Latin is ignoramus.

God may at one time have overlooked the ignorance of man, but not now. God is knowable. God has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. That revelation has been made known to you, therefore you're inexcusable. You can know God; you should know God. There's no excuse for not knowing God. Knowing God is, no doubt, the greatest bit of knowledge man can ever attain. The most important knowledge man can ever attain.

You may be studying various subjects, but the most important subject any of you could ever study would be theology, to know God, to know the truth of God. He is knowable. At one time He overlooked the ignorance of man, but no more, and now God has commanded men everywhere to repent. That is, to turn. To turn from their own selfish ways unto Him.

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ([Act 17:31](#));

God has appointed a day of judgment. The judgment will be overseen by Jesus Christ, the man that He has ordained for that purpose.

whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead ([Act 17:31](#)).

God has declared and then proved His point through the resurrection. And thus, that day of judgment is coming for all men, and thus, God has said, "Repent, turn."

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter ([Act 17:32](#)).

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These are two common responses to the Gospel. There are those who mock at the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and then there are those who procrastinate. "Well, interesting. I'll listen to you again sometime." Putting off that repentance, putting off that decision. But beware, lest you put it off too long. For God has commanded now that men everywhere should repent. Because a day is coming in which God is going to judge men through Jesus Christ.

So Paul departed from among them ([Act 17:33](#)).

Now it is interesting where Paul was persecuted, where they threw him in jail, where they beat him, he was ready to go right back to continue preaching. But to this attitude of, "Well, interesting," but that noncommittal attitude, Paul had no further words to say. He wasn't going to cast the pearls before swine. "I've given you the message. I've borne witness; that's it."

I think that one of the worst attitudes is that of complacency. Really a person who is really upset and yelling at you because you've witnessed to them about the Lord is far closer to salvation than the person who says, "Well, I think that's very nice for you and I'm glad that you found something that makes you happy." That complacent attitude towards Christ is one of the most difficult to deal with. Better the person get stirred, better the person get upset if it shows that it's getting to him than just that complacency.

Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman name Damaris, and others with them ([Act 17:34](#)).

So there were a few and, of course, as church history goes, we do find that there was a church established in Athens and some of the early church leaders came from the church in Athens. But Paul established no real work in Athens on this visit. But he moves on to Corinth, and if you want to really get a background, you can read Corinthians, too, this week. And then we find him going to Ephesus by the end of the chapter, and so the Ephesian epistle would help you there. So you're going to have to watch a few less soaps and get a little bit more into the Word this week, I guess. But it won't hurt you.

Isn't it a shame how much time we waste in front of that stupid tube. I think that that's one of the greatest contributors to mediocrity in the world today, to dull people, to uncommunicative people. It's done more to destroy communication, relationships. Man, all the guy can relate to is the T.V. tube. What a shame. He doesn't learn to converse any more. He doesn't learn the art of conversation or relationships. We waste so much time. I hate to be radical, but you know, I dare say that if you left the T.V. off this week and when you're tempted to flip it on and instead just flip open your Bible and read the Corinthian epistles and the Galatian epistle, the Thessalonian epistle and the Ephesian epistle. I would say that next Sunday you would find yourself in such great spiritual spirits, you know.

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I'd say that you'd probably come to church just bubbling over. You'd probably have one of the better weeks of the year, and then you wonder, "How is it that this week is going so great?" You'll never guess. You've been feeding the Spirit instead of the flesh. And if you're feeding the Spirit, then of the Spirit you're going to reap life everlasting. If you feed the flesh, of the flesh you're going to reap corruption. Oh, well, it was a thought anyhow. You can hail me before the magistrates, beat me, do what you will; it was still a good idea. Why don't you try it? You might like it.

May the Lord be with you. May God bless you. May He just fill you with the knowledge and the understanding of Himself. That you may come to know Him in a deeper, fuller, richer way. That your life this week might just be enriched in all things in Jesus Christ. And growing up in Him to maturity you might come into that measure of the stature of the fullness of the image of Christ. As God by His Spirit restores that which was lost because of the fall. So God bless you in your walk and in your relationship with Him this week. May it get better than it ever was before.