

Series: Acts

Title: Natural or New?

Text: Acts 28: 1-6

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Acts 28: 1: And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2: And the barbarous people...

The word "barbarous" means these people were not Greeks, Romans or Jews. The importance is that they:

- Did not have the word of God
- Never heard the word of God preached.
- Yet, they were religious.

Illustration: Oldest standing religious structure in the world is in Malta--built before the days of Abraham.

Proposal: We will look at three problems with natural man's religion then we will look at the newness which God makes his born-again children.

I. NATURAL MAN AND HIS RELIGION

What do I mean by "natural man"? Every man, as he is born into this world, is a natural man. He is born of man, not born of the Spirit of God; he has physical life, no spiritual life.

Natural man is born religious. We see this in these island people of Melita.

- Natural Man Can Do Good Works Unto Others (**Acts 28: 2**)
- Natural man knows right and wrong and has an understanding of judgment (**Acts 28: 3-4.**)
- Natural Man Has a Consciousness of a Creator (**Acts 28: 4**) **Note:** The word "vengeance" in verse 4, is from a word signifying the name of one of their imaginary god's. They believed that the god of their imagination had power to take vengeance--"**vengeance suffereth not to live**".

What we see here are three things we about the natural man and his religion:

1. Man naturally has a consciousness of a Creator.
2. Man naturally has the law of right and wrong and an understanding of judgment.
3. Man's natural religion moves him to show kind works to others.

Let's see this in scripture:

First, by creation, God has given all men a consciousness of his being.

Romans 1: 19: Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed [it] unto them. 20: For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Secondly, even without the written law of God, all men are born with the law of right and wrong stamped upon their natural hearts and have a sense of judgment.

Romans 2: 14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and [their] thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;

Thirdly, man will do many wonderful works, but here is the problem with the natural man:

Romans 1:25: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. {turn to Romans 8}

A naturally religious man may do many works, but his mind is set on the things of the flesh (that which he does or does not do) rather than the things of the Spirit.

Romans 8:5: For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded [is] death; but to be spiritually minded [is] life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

We see an example of minding earthly things in our text.

1. They reasoned Paul to be guilty based on what they saw with their natural eye-adversity

Acts 28:4: And when the barbarians saw the [venomous] beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, **No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.**

2. Then they reasoned Paul to be a god (were willing to worship and serve man) based on what they saw with their natural eye--prosperity.

Acts 28: 5: And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after

they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Be sure we understand: The same pollution in these who never had the word of God, is the pollution of the naturally religious man who has the word of God.

1. He knows there is a God.
2. He has a sense of right and wrong and judgment of God
3. But the god of his imagination accepts or rejects man based on man's works.

Example: Paul's own countrymen after the flesh who had the word of God given them by God through his prophets:

Romans 10: 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. 2: For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 3: For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Review of what we have just seen: the naturally religious man:

1. Is corrupt in his understanding of God, even with the scriptures.
2. He is corrupt in his understanding of right and wrong and of judgment--God looks on the heart.
3. Because he is corrupt he minds the work of his flesh and the work of others.

Natural religion makes a man be kind to others only when he feels others have earned it. He regards guilt or righteousness by the prosperity or adversity in himself and others which he sees in his flesh and others. As quickly as he shows kindness, he charges, and just as quickly he worships man as if he were god. In all, the sum and substance of natural man's natural religion is the worship of man.

II. GOD MAKES ALL THINGS NEW.

We saw that natural man changes the truth of God into a lie.

A. First thing God does is send his preacher with a gospel that is altogether NEW from that former lie.

We are not told specifically that Paul preached the gospel or that God saved any here but God always sends his gospel to his lost sheep. The book of Acts is a declaration of this glorious truth.

- God sent Philip right to the Ethiopian Eunuch
- Christ sent Peter right to Cornelius and his house
- The Spirit forbid Paul to go to Asia, sent right to Lydia

- God put Paul in jail to preach the gospel of Christ to the Philippian Jailor and many in his house
- Just before our text: Paul stood on that ship and "sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island."

Get this point: Nothing in the salvation of sinners--especially not the preaching of the truth of the mighty work of God in Christ--is done through a lie! The sending of God's gospel in truth through his messengers is to the praise of the glory of God's grace, just as every other aspect of salvation. God makes ALL THINGS NEW--even sending THE GOSPEL which is altogether NEW from the lie of man.

B. We saw that natural man has a polluted understanding of right and of the judgment of God. Secondly, through his gospel, God the Holy Spirit reveals the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. HE makes Christ and his Work altogether NEW to his children.

When they saw Paul bitten by the serpent--they said, "vengeance suffereth not this man to live."

Our natural sense of righteousness and judgment is polluted by nature, but God makes his children to behold his righteousness in the face of Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus--the Seed of Woman--had his heel wounded by Satan, even as God promised from the garden. And when Christ was made sin "the justice of God required him to die."

1. Do you understand why Christ died on the cross?

Every child of God which the Father gave his Son before the world was made, became murderers by one transgression in the garden, in our first representative Adam. Christ is the last Adam--the representative Man who saves all those the Father gave to him.

2 Corinthians 5: 19-21.

God was in Christ reconciling every one of his chosen children--Jew and Gentile (called the world, as opposed to just the Jews)--by not imputing their sin unto them but to Christ.

God was in Christ providing HIMSELF a spotless Lamb, who because he was spotless in his own flesh, was a fit man to be made sin in place of his children. When Christ was made sin, justice suffered him not to live--**RIGHTEOUSNESS!** God was in Christ declaring himself just; God was in Christ declaring that He is the Justifier; God alone is the Justifier of all who believe.

"For He hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Co 5: 19, 21).

Acts 28: 5: And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

The Spirit of God makes the child of God behold **IN NEWNESS** that Christ successful redeemed every child he represented. He crushed the serpents head at Calvary.

John 12: 31: Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. 32: And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all {men} unto me.

Hebrews 1: 3:...when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

C. Thirdly, in the midst of our old dead body of flesh, by this Omnipotent Power of God working within, God makes his children NEW AND to serve in NEWNESS OF LIFE, NOT IN THE OLDNESS OF THE LETTER.

Acts 28: 6: Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Their change was all natural, but when God creates a new man within these body of flesh--all things become new.

1. By God-given faith, the believer looks--rejoicing in the successful, triumphant, risen Christ Jesus seated at God's own right hand

2. By God-given repentance, the believer's mind is changed from worshipping man to confessing and serving **THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD, the Lord our Righteousness, God our Savior, our All.**

3. THIS FREE GRACE OF GOD is THE NEW motive in all the works which believer does. The word "works of righteousness" means "works which are right" or "works of mercy".

- Naturally religious man imagines that God's election of grace was due to God foreseeing what man would do--"works of righteousness" which the sinner would do and therefore he chose him in Christ. Scripture says, 'WHOM he did foreknow...!'
- The naturally religious man who professes to believe on Christ, even imagines that it is by his works of righteousness that God rewards him due to his "works of righteousness."
- Neither is grace but works.

In Titus Paul has been declaring the importance of the believer maintaining good works. In chapter 3, Paul tells Titus to affirm constantly that good works toward others is--NOT based on others earning it. Paul tells Titus to remind the brethren that God was merciful, and continues to be merciful to us, not because of our works of righteousness!

Titus 3: 3: For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one

another. 4: But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 5: Not by works of righteousness which we HAVE DONE, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; 7: That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8: [This is] a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that...

On the foundation of God's grace alone

Titus 3: 8:...that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

The faithful saying is the gospel of free, unmerited grace. This is the constant affirming by which the believer maintains good works which are only by the constraint of the love of Christ for us.

Be sure you get this: brethren, maintain good works--but put no confidence in your works! Any natural man can show kindness. But good works are those created by God in the heart which is motivated by faith that the triune God of glory in Christ has saved the believer by his mighty works, by his free, distinguishing grace.

The believer show kindness not based on natural reasons (whether a man earns it from us), we judge not whether a man is right with God based on his outward prosperity or adversity, but we trust that those who profess Christ to be their all are righteous in Christ alone. And those who yet walk contrary to the faith, we trust God to save by the same power with which he worked for us and in us through his gospel. In doing so, we serve the true and living God in NEWNESS of the grace God and not in the natural man. Only those works done from the new heart (of God's creating) constrained by the love of Christ for us, are truly good works.

What did we just hear? God makes all things new:

1. A new gospel--in truth and in spirit
2. A new--true understanding of righteousness--Christ our Righteousness
3. Made new creatures by God, with the new motive of grace!

To God be the glory!