

Shining the Light to Darkened Minds **Ephesians 4:17-21, Acts 19:8-20**

Introduction:

1. The Apostle Paul was a man on a mission (**Ephesians 3:8**). He wanted all men (**Ephesians 3:9**) to see what God had done for them in Christ.
2. Paul realized that there was a great gap between lost mankind and God. You may ask, "What gap are you talking about?" **Ephesians 4:17-19** describes this gap.
 - A lack of understanding creates a gap between lost mankind and God. There is no spiritual life; because there is no spiritual understanding.
3. How do people's minds become darkened toward God?
 - Sin has darkened people's minds. vs. 19; **John 3:19**
 - Satan has darkened people's minds. vs. 27; **2 Corinthians 4:4**
 - False doctrine has darkened people's minds. vs. 14; **Titus 1:14-16**
4. This same gap exists today in countries and people groups all over the world. Do you remember when this lack of understanding existed in your life? Thank God somebody bridged the gap for you!
5. Our mission as a church is to bridge this gap for others. This is one of the primary reasons we exist. Think about it:
 - We know a gracious God with a divine plan for forgiveness and eternal life.
 - But, out there is lost mankind with their understanding darkened.
6. We have been called to bridge that gap for as many individuals, countries, and people groups that we possibly can. How can we bridge this gap of a lack of understanding?

It will take people who will stand in the gap.

1. God has no other plan to bridge this gap other than people. In **Ezekiel 22:30**, God said he sought for **a man** to stand in the gap. **cf. Romans 10:13-14**
2. We read the description of the Gentiles of Ephesus in 4:17-19, but yet look at 1:1. How did this happen? Because one day a man named Paul showed up in Ephesus. **Acts 19:1**
 - This wasn't Paul's home. He was from Antioch.
 - Why would he end up here? Because he was a man on a mission - he was a missionary!
 - He didn't know these people, but he knew they were sinful, wicked, and spiritually ignorant of the truth (as he once was). They needed understanding. He was willing to stand in the gap for the people of Ephesus.
3. Let me show you some pictures (missionaries for conference).
 - Why would they go to these foreign lands? Because there is a gap (multitudes with no spiritual understanding), and they have said, "We will stand in that gap."
 - Why would we help them? Because they are on the same mission we are. We can't go to Guyana, etc., but we can help them to be able to go and stand in the gap.

It will take the systematic teaching of God's Word.

1. Paul begins in the Jewish synagogue (**Acts 19:8**). He is disputing (to say thoroughly, discuss) and persuading (convince by argument) from God's Word.
2. The Jews would not believe the truth of God (religious pride), so Paul tried a different approach (verse 9). Paul set up shop in this school or lecture hall, and for two years the

people in this area heard the Word of God (verse 10), not just from Paul, but from the disciples he was training and teaching (verse 9).

3. Paul's message focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ (verse 10).
4. What was Paul doing? He was teaching God's truth, and thereby bridging that gap of a lack of understanding.
 - It is God's Word that brings light and understanding. **Psalms 19:7-8, 119:104, 130** (simple - foolish); **Ephesians 3:4**
5. Notice verse 20 states, "*So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*"
 - "Prevailed" means "to have or exercise force."
 - "Mightily" means "powerfully, vigorously."
6. God's Word is spiritual dynamite (**Romans 1:16**). It was a force in Ephesus. It pierces and penetrates (**Hebrews 4:12**) and brings enlightenment and understanding to darkened minds.
7. This is what our missionaries are doing, systematically teaching and explaining God's Word. They are bridging that gap, seeking to bring understanding to darkened minds.

It will take willing hearts to learn and believe God's Word.

1. God's Word was taught and Jesus was magnified (**Acts 19:17**), and many chose to believe (**Acts 19:18**). Their lives were radically changed by the spiritual truth Paul taught (**Acts 19:19**).
 - This is exactly what we read in **Ephesians 4:17-21**.
2. The Ephesians' understanding was once darkened and they were alienated from the life of God. They were spiritually ignorant and blind (**Ephesians 4:17-19**). But when Paul showed up teaching God's Word:
 - They heard the truth of Jesus. **Ephesians 4:21**
 - They were taught the truth of Jesus. **Ephesians 4:21**
 - They learned the truth of Jesus. **Ephesians 4:20**
3. As our missionaries teach God's Word, there are inevitably people who will hear and learn God's Word. Do you know what these people then do? They come to Jesus (**John 6:45**), and their life is forever changed (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).
4. The missionary then forms this group into a local church. Like Paul, he teaches and trains leadership so that when he leaves, the teaching of God's Word continues. **Acts 20:27-28**
5. At that point the missionary can go to another place and stand in the gap, teaching God's Word, and bringing understanding to darkened minds.

In Conclusion:

1. This is the mission. This is why we exist. We are all about taking the truth of God to people who have no spiritual life and are spiritually ignorant. Why? So that they can come to an **understanding** of the truth. We must bridge the gap!
2. Paul says that we are ambassadors for Christ. We have been given a glorious message (**Colossians 1:27**). What should be our response? **Colossians 1:28-29** (Warning and teaching every man!)