

Are You Looking For Some New Thing? (Part 1)

Novelty and Itching Ears

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In every city and town on earth, especially in the United States where free speech has been a way of life for hundreds of years (although it seems that it is being taken away from us on a daily basis), there is an obvious itch for news. People are obsessed with hearing some new thing. There are large numbers of news programs from many different perspectives:

- Liberals and Conservatives each have their own programs.
- Disgustingly, the gays and lesbians, not only have their own joint programs, but each has their own separate program as well.
- "Normal" women (it is a shame that we have to word it that way these days) have their own program, and teens have theirs.
- The world's Christians have their own news programs, and the world's Muslims have theirs.
- The Americans have theirs, the Canadians have theirs, the French have theirs, and the South Africans have theirs.

News programs have now reached airtime of 24 hours a day on radio and television here in the United States. They are produced by individuals with worldly, shallow uncertainty. They are broadcast to a society of unsettled minds. My use of the word "society" today will be all encompassing. It will refer to the world as a whole, so society and the world both are going to mean the same thing.

Sadly, the written Word of God is neither read nor heard with half the hunger and determination as newspapers, internet news, and news programs. Even worse, some members of God's Church are guilty of the same thing. The attraction of reading or hearing some new thing is not some new thing.

Why are people constantly looking for something new? Has society always been obsessed with seeing or hearing some new thing? Or is this the first time in history that this has been a problem?

During Greece's heyday, the Athenian writers give the same account of their fellow citizens as we observe in society today. Demosthenes (a Greek) refers to the Athenians as, "inquiring, in the place of public resort, if there were any news." Thucydides (Greek) said to them, "You are excellent in suffering yourselves to be deceived by novelty of

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speech." Aelian (Greek) says of the Athenians that they are "versatile in novelties." They love to hear the new things and it does not matter where it is coming from as long as it is different.

The apostle Paul observed this obsession, to hear something new, when he traveled to Athens and he confronted the people of Athens regarding it.

Acts 17:16-19 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?"

The Athenians, and those there, were perfectly willing to hear anything.

Acts 17:20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

Some translations say, "very superstitious".

Acts 17:21 "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

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We see God's total control over everything on this earth.

Acts 17:27 "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; "for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

Think about what the image of Christ is in the world today in Protestantism and Catholicism. Also in the art of either Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo or some of these other earlier artists from their own human reasoning.

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."

Even still, some of those people could not resist the new information they felt they were getting.

Acts 17:33 So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

I want to emphasize verse 21:

Acts 17:21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there *spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.*

This incident is very interesting, and important, from several perspectives. It is interesting in its report of the life and the ministry of the apostle Paul. But what makes it especially fascinating is that here we find Paul in the City of Athens, in one of the most significant encounters in the history of mankind.

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Paul, the apostle of Christ is standing up and preaching in the center of the western world's philosophy, art and culture, which you might call the headquarters of it. It is a very dramatic period that has affected every one of us to this day. What we really have here is an explanation of the whole human history!

We are now living in days of historical crisis. It is important to understand that our view of history and of the whole course of the world, and of what is happening today and what may well happen in the immediate future, has been influenced by what can be reduced to this:

Human existence has been a great conflict between two powers—two great forces. One has been man's culture and philosophy, influenced by Satan which we call society or the world, as I mentioned earlier. On the other hand there is the Word of God, and the way of life it requires.

It is very obvious that this conflict is occurring. Most of the time human culture is dominant. The Old Testament is a picture of the ongoing and continuing conflict. The nations of the world and their civilizations and cultures are in conflict with the people of God who have persevered. It is a perseverance against the world.

The other thing that stands out in Paul's situation here is that our understanding of this conflict between these two views and these two opposite ways of life is not something that is of merely theoretical curiosity or academic interest. It is something that applies to every one of us. It is something that requires a decision on the part of every single human being. Notice how this chapter ended.

Acts 17:32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."

You see there the decision between the two. That is one group! But then there was another.

Acts 17:34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

There was a division immediately when the truth was spoken! Some believed what Paul was saying—others mocked and rejected the message. We are all confronted by this choice! Every one of us has been in, or is in, one or the other of these two positions. We

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are either holding on to the world and its society and its culture—OR ELSE—we are of the 'people of God' who belong to God!

It is a tremendously important decision because we are being carried along every moment we live towards the ultimate, final, irrevocable decision that God will have to make in the judgment.

True Christianity is something that causes people to think and analyze because it is a search for TRUTH. Society's idea that "Christianity" is some kind of sanctimonious emotional high is such a travesty because they are losing out on so much.

In Acts 17, we see Paul reasoning and arguing with the Stoics and the Epicureans and with many others in this famous City of Athens.

As we value our lives in the present moment, and as we look to the future and above all to our deaths, which are bound to come—the most vital question of all is: Which is it? Are we trusting in society or are we trusting in the living God? Of course, your answer to that is that you are trusting in the living God. But then we have to take a step back and ask are we really or is the influence of our society so intense and so forceful on us that maybe we are slipping in some areas?

Let us take a look at these two things. Here is a picture of the long history of humanity. We can start by looking at human culture—at 'society'! This of course is the thing to which most people today cling. They are trusting in society—they are trusting in human knowledge and in human ideas. An example of the way that we sometimes slip into trusting in our society is that we trust our government to protect us with its military. Even though we know that God is our true protection and our faith should be in Him, still we slip and believe that our military will save us. I am talking about 'we' in God's church.

I think that we would be surprised if we really knew how much we base decisions on what society dictates. I am not just talking about the religious influence of Greek thought that John Ritenbaugh has been speaking about. That is another story. These ancient Greek philosophers who were influenced by earlier seekers of knowledge have influenced everyone in all aspects of his life. And before them, Nimrod and Semiramis had a great influence on the world and these Greek philosophers were even influenced by them. And Satan, the master conspirator, has promoted these perversions from the beginning.

Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil

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continually.

This is certainly a statement that describes the worldly society today.

Genesis 6:6-8 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

We realize that the society must have been awful at that time that God had to destroy it by a flood. And, it is at least as awful today.

Under Satan's influence, the early knowledge seekers, and later the Greek philosophers promoted his way of life. Later, the Romans followed the same influence. We even have a Senate as part of our ruling body just as the Roman Empire did—including a capital complete with an obelisk. Our public school systems promote the teachings of the philosophers Socrates and Plato, as well as mathematicians Euclid and Archimedes, as well as Pythagoras.

The result is, a society today that is entirely based on human reasoning. And since the human mind is hostile toward God, society as a whole (which was produced by human reasoning as a result of Satan's influence) must be inherently wicked. So why do we sometimes allow ourselves to be influenced by this very flawed system called 'society'?

History has shown that society varies in its influence and dominance. Society has had greater effects on individuals and families at one time than another.

By the time the apostle Paul arrived in Athens, the real glory of Greece had already passed. It was already in decline. Another great manifestation of civilization was rising, and that was the great Roman Empire, but that also later declined. Then society went through the Middle Ages to what was called the Renaissance—the revival of learning.

Actually, this revival went back to Greek logic and reasoning, and it has, in a sense, been controlling Western society ever since, especially since the 18th century when we had the so called 'enlightenment' period in our western history. It was then that men began to ridicule and criticize the Bible, and its message, and to turn their backs on it and turn again to the Greek model of 'society'. Of course, man has always ridiculed

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God's Word, but it was in great force that it began in the 18th century.

We are living in a period when society is again in a state of extreme crisis. It is in a state of rapid decline! And, as biblical prophecy has predicted, we are very much in the same position as was reached in Athens at the time Paul visited it.

It has never been more urgent for us to make quite sure that we understand exactly what it is that society has to offer. And in contrast, what God has to offer us on the other side. We have to constantly keep in the forefront of our minds the direct and extreme contrast between these two ways of life—this world's society and God's way of life.

What do we find in society? What are its main characteristics? Society is something that always starts with 'human beings'—they and their reasoning are the center!

Society is an enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another, totally human centered. Satan helped form this society that is diametrically opposite God's, by convincing a third of the angels to follow his rebellious philosophy. But this was not enough for Satan, as you very well know!

Satan had to promote his demonic way of life to human beings beginning with Adam and Eve. Because he was so successful, even through the descendents of Noah, he firmly established his society by perverting God's standards down through the ages, as God allowed him to do so.

Heavily influenced by demonic society, the Greeks, whom Paul was confronting in Acts 17 were great teachers by the world's standards and they sought to illuminate things as they saw them. They found a source for power over others by the manipulation of language. So the Greeks became infamous for Greek logic, circular reasoning. They would even, at the time of Paul, take students and discuss issues with them. The students, at the beginning, would believe one thing and by the time the philosophers, teachers and scholars did circular reasoning, they would bring them around to disagreement with what they originally believed.

The Greeks believed and taught that, "Man is the measure of everything" And, that man is supreme, and there is nothing beyond man. What we are looking at here, is the foundation of our society. Satan, of course, is the foundation's instigator so to speak. They trusted the Greek philosophers' and scholars' (Satan's) reason, his intellect, his brainpower, his understanding, his truth, his experimentation, and his arrival at ultimate knowledge. Still in this society today academia still relies on much of that satanic

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thought.

Society is full of confidence in this ability of men to solve all major problems and make the world a perfect place of harmony. This is the basis of society. At first glance, from a physical standpoint, there is a lot to be said for man's accomplishments. Just look at man's achievement today from the world's perspective. However, from our perspective we see the flaw in all of it.

Take this great Greek society that had risen in Greece, especially in Athens before Paul went there. The achievement was really quite amazing. That is why they became so impressive even down through history to this point. They were primarily interested in 'life' itself. Their great men were the so-called 'philosophers'.

A philosopher is a man who on finding himself in this world, and finding problems and unhappiness, begins to wonder about and contemplate his life and life around him. What a philosopher is, is a man who is lost.

He begins to ask questions and to say, "What is life? Why is life this way? Should things be like this? What is man? What is his purpose?" And so they began to evolve their own theories. Each man saw things as was right in his own eyes.

They were very interested in 'politics' because it most affected their lives. They even introduced the term. It applied to the type of government of their city-states, that is the term politics. They were sure they could bring some order into the chaos they saw in government. So they began to design systems of government. Plato actually said that the republic was the most perfect form of government. What do we live in today in the United States? A republic!

They were the ones who invented the term 'democracy' of which we hear so much today. They observed society and thought that people were living in a chaotic manner. So the philosophers analyzed life as a whole, and humanly reasoned that men and women should be divided up according to their respective gifts and abilities into various grades. Does this sound familiar in our society? Then, they should be appointed specific work. And ever since, leaders have tried to do so with great effort. That is POLITICS!

They had great poets, and great dramatists who attempted to put the wonder of man into meaningful manifestations. And, there again, you see that they were concerned about understanding the great mystery and the great problem of life. And they promoted their view of life!

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Beyond that, they were very interested in architecture and they put up magnificent buildings because they wanted to express the sense of beauty and of wonder. The same applied to sculpture. The ruins of their buildings and the remnants of their sculptures are impressive to this day, even just the ruins. And they pursued all of this with great effort.

Not only that, they were very interested in 'eloquence of speech'. The greatest orators that the world has ever known were Greeks! Demosthenes still stands out as one of the greatest orators of all time.

An example was, Pericles, who delivered his great orations when the City of Athens was being attacked. These men are remembered through the ages because of their great fluency and persuasiveness of speech.

Also, they had a kind of basic science. Many of you have had to struggle with geometry and you have come across the names of Pythagoras and Euclid. These were great secular achievements.

But I wonder very strongly if these men did not get their information about mathematics from the writings of Solomon or from the Israelites. It is interesting that the Greeks began to rise in greatness of thought and of empire about three hundred years after Solomon died. Some of the information came from Babylon, where the Jews were taken into captivity, and I read that the Greeks received some of their information from Babylon and they built on that. I personally feel that they got it from the Israelites and they plagiarized it. We know that this world's history has made an effort to erase ancient Israel and its history from the scene and no doubt this is one of the replacements that we see.

And as if this was not enough of an influence on society today, they were also very interested in sports and 'development of the body'. So what do we see today on television? The Olympics. These men founded the basis of most of what has come down to us in this present society. Everything we are taught is based on the original thinking of these idolized human beings.

There you have a brief summary of what 'culture' and 'society' stood for and represented when Paul addressed the men of Athens. There is no question that the Greeks had achieved extraordinary influence in the world. Paul was in the very center of it all—the great City of Athens speaking to the greatest minds of that day.

There stood this little man, Paul—not impressive—not eloquent by the world's

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standards. He was dismissed as a babbler! There he stood in the midst of their great achievements. And he was opposing it with certainty.

But, what is significant about all of this is that it was already failing to satisfy. That is, the knowledge that these men had was already failing to satisfy them, and that is why Athens is so known for seeking anything new. We notice this one defect right away. When the apostle Paul appeared, notice what they said about him—they dismissed him as a 'babbling' asking "What will this babbling say?"

That tends to be a characteristic of those who believe in society and who are part of society.

They were condescending! They were conceited! They were the 'elitists' of their day and they looked down upon the ordinary man, the commoner. In reality, to dismiss the apostle Paul as a babbling was just a confession of their failure to understand and to show that they had no insight!

But, since he probably was not dressed as in style as they were, and he did not pose as one of the great teachers, he was dismissed as a babbling. And you know 'society' has very little use for the commoner. They looked on Paul as a commoner because he had not graduated from their Greek schools.

We see this same arrogant attitude today. These elitists write their clever articles for the newspapers, and the analysts speak on television. In their tone of voice we hear them say, "The commoner is alright for tedious labor, but he does not understand as we, the illuminists, do!" Of course, we do not hear them say that, but that is what we perceive as we listen to them

That is a real weakness, and it is one of the weaknesses that show the ultimate hollowness of society! But you know that there is something much more supreme than what this society has to offer.

Acts 17:21 "For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing."

Again, you see a banner of society today. What does that tell us? That they had not found what they were looking for. Their search had not satisfied them. People are always looking for something new. They admit that they are not satisfied with the knowledge and understanding they have. And that was the trouble in Athens!

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The elite of Athens, the great Greek teachers, had humanly reasoned for two or three centuries before Paul visited Athens. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, the greatest philosophers of recorded history, with their incomparable teaching had not been satisfied. Because they are waiting for some new thing! That some new thing that they are waiting for is something to satisfy their uncertainty.

They rushed after anyone who showed up with a new theory or a new idea. Here were the Stoics saying one thing, and the Epicureans saying the exact opposite, but offering similar sounding rhetoric! It sounds just like the Democrats and the Republicans today. Or the 'Catholic Christians' and the 'Protestant Christians'. Or the Shiite Muslims and the Sunni Muslims. All have their own versions of their idea of truth and of life

Then there were various other schools in Greece. There were the great schools, the Porches, and the Academies, and they were rivals. They argued and debated and confuted one another and the people were utterly confused. So they rushed after anyone who came along with a new idea and this is what the world's society today is based on.

Actually, of course, there was nothing new in any of the teachings that came along. With all of his wisdom, Solomon saw the fruitlessness of new things such as these.

Ecclesiastes 1:8-11 All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after.

Here we see a description that is just as applicable of society today. They forget that the society that we have today is nothing new. It is just a remake of something old. Here we see a description that is just as applicable today in our society as it ever has been.

What the Greeks thought were new were not new but sufficiently diverse from what had come before and it stimulated a cynical and lethargic society. It is interesting that two other groups in society were the 'skeptics' and the 'cynics'. So what do we have today? Scepticism and cynicism, directly from those groups in Greece. When I went through this study I was just flabbergasted even though I knew of how much of an influence and how nothing is new today in this society. It is amazing. Without realizing it, those Greeks

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were admitting that they were spiritually bankrupt. Nothing satisfied them—not their affluence, not their education. They still longed for and needed something of substance! So they rushed after the new thing, or the newer thing searching for satisfaction.

Long time members of God's church have been able to observe the failure of this world's society from a unique perspective as citizens of heaven. We four ministers of the Church of the Great God, for example, have a combined attendance in the church of God of 160 years. We can reach back to a lot of things that we have seen, not only in this society but also in the church. People are always looking for something new. Many of you old time members, who have been coming for thirty or forty years, have seen many things.

When we look back at the fads of ideas and heresies we have seen, if it were not so tragic, it would be very entertaining and even laughable. I am referring not only to secular society but also to the church society. There have been challenges to the Hebrew calendar, tithing, and Sabbath keeping. The list is almost endless, and it does not matter how firmly proven a doctrine is, there is always somebody who is going to come along and challenge it. There are always the tares in the church who are willing to challenge these teachings. So, we see that the tendency in the church, as it is in the world, is to seek newer things.

What do all of the fads in the church mean? What does all of the questioning of established doctrine indicate? It means that those people who question those things are not satisfied and they are uncertain of what they believe. With all the knowledge that they have deep down they are dissatisfied and are not content.

But, let me show you the failure in another respect. Did you notice what we were told in Acts 17:22? While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city completely given over to idolatry. Now remember, we are reading here about Athens—the center of 'philosophy'.

When Paul got there before his companions and while he was waiting for them to arrive, he walked around the city and what struck him was that the place was cluttered with temples to the various gods. He found a strange temple with an uncharacteristic inscription... "TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD."

It is interesting that Athens, of all places of illumination and philosophy and science, was full of temples!

Paul says, "I perceive that in all things you are very religious." Some translations say

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'superstitious'. He sees that they are TOO RELIGIOUS——full of religious confusion. He is telling them that they are too idolatrous! These people did not realize it, but they were discontent with the 'philosophy' and 'human reasoning' of men and it was not enough! They were dissatisfied and it left them uncertain of what they believed.

We have never had more learning than we have today in this society. We have never had more idolatry! But what does that tell us? People have a deep, deep uncertainty! They have a profound dissatisfaction and an anxiety of discontentment!

Nick Gillespie, the editor-in-chief, of Reason Magazine, wrote an article in June titled, "The Age of Uncertainty". His subheading read, "All we know is that we know something." He ends his article this way:

Not only has Governor Schwarzenegger starred in a memorable movie (Total Recall) based on a story by the great, insane writer Philip K. Dick, but Arnold's victory reads like a story by Dick, whose work is suffused with a sense of unreality, of never knowing whether you are awake or dreaming, seeing straight or hallucinating?. barely into a new century and nothing but big questions that require difficult answers. And more information than ever, none of which may make it any easier to draw the right conclusions.

That is a description of this society.

Nick Gillespie is a man who looks at and describes this society as an uncertain society. . A society of carnal human beings and it is obvious to him.

In the last days, we know that knowledge increases; and with this knowledge does not come understanding and wisdom. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. So at the end time, this vast flood of knowledge will be of no real use because NONE, other than the elect of God, will use this knowledge correctly or righteously.

In II Timothy 3 Paul warns Timothy that there are silly women who are associated with the church. They seem to be true Christians, but put themselves completely under the sway of false religious teachers, while never able to acquire a true understanding of what salvation really means.

They may learn about Jesus Christ, but they never really understand the true nature of His life and what is required of Christians. Many gain speculative familiarity with the "doctrines" of Christianity, but never internalize God's way of life and they never apply it in their lives in a correct way. They never understand how to apply biblical principles

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and many become familiar with the various philosophical theories of religion, but never comprehend its true importance. Paul warns of this problem, of searching for knowledge for knowledge's sake, occurring in the last days.

This search for knowledge is not a true search for knowledge. It is a search for pleasantly exciting information. Today, we see this unbalanced behavior in the obsession of some concerning prophecy.

Many have strayed from the TRUTH because they have allowed themselves to be enticed by men who primarily speak on prophecy. Getting a glimpse of what might happen in our future is fascinating. It is fascinating to all of us. There is no doubt about it! It is fascinating to people in the world as well that is why so many of these futuristic movies do so well.

Herbert Armstrong suggested that as much as one third of the Bible may be prophecy. However, I do not believe he intended to indicate that we should spend one third of our time on prophecy. So let me ask you four pointed questions:

- Do you spend more time researching and studying prophecy, than working to finding out about hidden sins in your life and how to overcome them?
- Do you spend more time reading prophecy speculations, than learning to appreciate Christ's sacrifice?
- Do you spend more time analyzing the lives of politicians, than understanding the teachings of the life of Christ and how to live like Him?
- Do you spend more time watching for prophetic events in the news, than preparing for the Kingdom of God?

Paul warned Timothy about the effects of looking for some new thing—always learning but never able to understand God's truth and how to apply it.

II Timothy 3:1-9 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now

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as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

There were two ways in which these heretics in the days of Timothy, could exert an evil influence. Remember that they were Gnostics and that the basic principle of Gnosticism was that spirit was altogether good, and matter altogether evil to put it very simplistically.

The Gnostic heretics taught, either that, since matter is altogether evil, a rigid asceticism must be practiced and all the things of the body as far as possible eliminated, or that it does not matter what we do with the body and its desires can be indulged in to the limit because they do not matter. So you see two extremes and you see the confusion among the Greek Gnostics.

It is Paul's charge that such confused people are "willing to learn from anyone, and yet never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." This discontentment and looking for something new has been called intellectual curiosity without moral earnestness.

There is the type of person who is eager to discuss any and every new theory. This person is always found deeply involved in the latest trendy religious movement, but is unwilling to make the effort to try to live God's way of life. No amount of intellectual curiosity can ever take the place of moral earnestness.

We are not meant to have our minds titillated with the latest intellectual crazes; we are meant to purify and strengthen ourselves in the spiritual battle to live God's way of life.

Now, in contrast to that, look at the world today. There are extraordinary events and forces that are having a significant impact on society and the future of the world. Society, as we have known it, is in a global transition—a global upheaval of great uncertainty! It is causing people great anxiety as the result of this dissatisfaction and uncertainty of the security of their future. Let me give you some examples of what is causing monumental uncertainty in society today:

1. Worldwide Spiritual Revival

It is obvious that there exists a growing worldwide "spiritual" revival. As the world has become less and less predictable, more and more people are looking for meaning

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beyond their material environment. No longer is the wealth that this nation has enough before turning to spiritualism. This has caused a dramatic increase in traditional and non-traditional religious and spiritual practice all over the world. Everything from fundamentalism to the psychic network figures in this explosion of spiritual questing.

A man named Watts Wacker is a futurist at the Stanford Research International. His job is to predict driving forces in the world. He says that in that part of the world that is supersaturated with physical things, status will hinge on what is SCARCE. He speculates that spiritual experiences are becoming increasingly important because for the past hundred years most people have imagined "things" as equal in meaning to the inspirational. He says that following the information age, and the preeminence of knowledge, people will transition into something called the 'dream society' in which people will place massive worth in the spiritual. We see this beginning to happen now.

2. Global Economy

We now have all of the technology in place to have a truly global economy. Before the industrial revolution the marketplace was local. In the Industrial Age locally centered economies gave way to national economic systems. Now we have entered the era of global economics. Wealth, raw materials, labor, manufacturing, and marketing are all being redistributed around the world.

3. Worldwide Education Reformation

Networked computer systems have become the dominant organizational system for academic information. What little control scholars and educational leaders had left at the end of the last century is quickly dissipating and being controlled by an elite few. This is becoming the case in most areas of intellectual interaction. A side note to this is that we see the same thing happening in the news media where it is being consolidated and confined to just a few sources like Associated Press International (API) and some of those types of sources.

4. Worldwide Economic and Political Upheaval

National governments, as the prime tool for the management and distribution of power, are diminishing in individual effectiveness and dominance. The United States must now learn to operate in an environment of shifting, toppling, and even flattening

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governments—a world where information technology, multi-national finance, world famine, and ethnic conflict are but a few of the interconnecting threads in the emerging global fabric. So, we see that the only nation at this point that is very successful at controlling this is the United States because of its massive power, especially in the information world.

5. Social and Economic Transitions

It is clear that we are standing poised on the edge of a world in the middle of multiple social and economic transitions. This is unprecedented in the history of the world. The speed and depth that these shifts are having, and will continue to have, is increasingly impacting on people's lives. It is not only because the economic, political and social dominions are being turned upside down. Today, more than ever, people live in an uncertain world.

These are known as knowledge transitions——knowledge shifts taking place in the way people perceive the world that are having major effects on their daily lives and causing such uncertainty, fear and anxiety.

In the human historical period of the Dark Ages, knowledge was destroyed by book burnings and hidden from the common people. This was part of the way that the Catholic church was able to keep such tight control on Europe, because they controlled the flow of information. A great fear and anxiety hung over the religious leaders that the truth would make the people free of them and so they hid the truth.

Today, there are knowledge transitions?that is, changes in what people thought they knew, causing them to become more uncertain and dissatisfied. I showed you, in a sense, physical types of transitions that gave people anxiety, but there are also knowledge transitions.

The first knowledge transition relates to what society knows and does not know. Think about it. Now, for the first time, science textbooks are saying, "Scientists now think," or "based on the most current research we feel that..." They have removed their dogmatic statements and are starting to put a lot of doubt in people's minds. In many of those areas this is good, for example evolution.

When I went to public school, knowledge came to you in a box. We were led to believe that all of the basic knowledge had been figured out. History was linear, math was finite, and physics promised a controlled and predictable future. And now, surprise! Everything

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is being reconsidered—that is the world's uncertain society!

The second knowledge transition is society's understanding of how things work. Not only is everything being reconsidered and redefined—people are now being told that the central unifying, constant, organizing principle of the universe is something called 'chaos'. And chaos does not mean random craziness any more. No, it does not mean that at all, although it still means that to me.

It means apparent random craziness that is actually organized and interconnected in some very complex ways that are not all that predictable. There you have the elite statement of society. And even though this theory has been proven wrong, it remains in government issued textbooks partly because of the egos of preeminent scientists who refuse to admit they are wrong. And, besides it is politically correct to believe and teach anything other than Creationism. That is the world's uncertain society! Darwin got his theories from the Greek philosophers. They had the same belief that he did, that life came from the most basic element and it evolved. So he was not original in the least.

The third knowledge transition is that although the pace of change is increasing exponentially—society does not know it. I am not talking about individuals, I am talking about society as a whole. They know things are going fast, but in order to cope they are getting used to things at a much faster pace. It is affecting us in God's church as well, because we are getting used to things at a much faster pace.

That means for some people, the good old days are the 1980's. And as the rate and volume of change increases, their capacity to process and retain information is overtaxed. As a result, they are more inclined to focus on the immediate and lose their long-range perspective of everything, including history. If history is forgotten, it repeats itself. In other words, they are losing their memories and their sense of history. That is the world's uncertain society!

The fourth knowledge transition relates to society's beliefs. There is a very real revolution going on rooted in the struggle over changing values. Very little of what was considered the cultural norm during the first half of the twentieth Century has not been altered in one way or another.

In contrast:

Ecclesiastes 2:26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is

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vanity and grasping for the wind.

As society began the last decade of the last century, the debate intensified over such foundational issues as the loss of the nuclear family, the changing roles of men and women, the definition of right and wrong, our relationship to the earth, the distribution of wealth, the freedom of expression, the importance of cultural identity and much more. Society has been doing what seems right in its own eyes. That is the world's uncertain society!

These rapid changes in what society knows, how things work, and what they believe, are unnerving. They are moving from an era when they thought they were just moments away from nailing down all of the loose ends to a new era that seems to have more questions than it does answers. This society is in total confusion.

They ask, "Is this the end of the age of certainty?" But, was there really ever certainty in the world—in society to begin with? My answer to that is no, but it is worse than it ever has been.

Remember, what the Athenians said to Paul in Acts 17

Acts 17:20-21 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean. For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

They had never been certain about the great questions of life—death and eternity! What was the matter with these people? They had listened to the great teachings of the great philosophers— and it only took them so far and then it left them hanging. They felt that there must be something more because they could see some unseen influences.

They believed there is a god of war, a god of love, a god of peace, and many other gods. And they assumed that these were influencing the world and that they had a greater power than human reasoning. So they built places to worship these unseen gods and unseen spiritual powers. And they made the temples with their own hands as Paul reminded them!

They had made their own gods, their own idols—built temples to them and then bowed down and worshipped them! These educated people; these philosophers,

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intellectuals and the people who had been listening to the philosophers had, by their own actions, confessed to the complete failure of their philosophers, teachers, and of their society as a whole.

And then there was this strange temple with the odd inscription... TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD! The Athenians thought there must be a god behind all the other gods. They thought they knew the god of war, the god of peace and the god of love.

They feared the God Paul pointed to, but they did not know him. As Paul reminded the Corinthians later Christ is the power and wisdom of God, not some idol or some temple.

I Corinthians 1:18-25 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The world, by wisdom, did not know God then and it does not know this now. So whenever a true minister of God, or a member of God's church, tells someone in the world about God's way of life it is foolishness to them, because they know better. They have listened to the intellectuals, the illuminists and the philosophers. The philosophers have always been trying to find the power behind the scenes, but they cannot. They are as far away today as they were in the first century. So they put up the inscription...TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD! The philosophers and scholars have failed society! They continue to fail society, but society still looks to them.

We see this in our schools—elementary to higher education. There is no greater folly in society than for people to put their faith and trust in those academic achievements. People believe that they can solve all of their own problems. They believe that man with his learning and understanding is supreme. Human reasoning has failed society! We can see it but society cannot.

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Look at this modern world—with all of its culture, and all of its lectures, and all of its books that are coming out of the presses every day of every week of every month of every year—and all of the knowledge it has. But, what is the state of the world?

Serious interest in astrology and the occult has increased. Cultured, educated people seek their horoscopes in the daily newspapers. Even the President that we had did. Ronald Regan's wife sought her horoscope every day in the newspaper. They want to know, "What is going to happen to me today?" So they seek natural things—material things. We have the environmentalist movement where people are looking to nature for the answers.

They have to fall back on something transcendental—something beyond, but they do not even know what it is! So they turn to drugs and alcohol. Never has their use been greater. 'Rational' human beings—philosophical people have to drink alcohol to keep going! They have to take drugs to find answers beyond material things. Or, they have to take drugs and alcohol to forget what they do not know!

This uncertainty manifests itself in idolatry. People worship what pleases them. Not necessarily what is good for them. And, as a result, there is a revolt of all of this against reason itself, and some of the most intellectual people of the world have become totally irrational.

This is the same type of failure society experienced in the first century. And yet we see people scoff at God and turn to human beings and society for the answers. This attempt had all been tried with great diligence before the Son of God ever came into this world.

In addition to all that, there was, and is, a terrible moral failure. And the statistics of the time given in secular history books indicate that the suicide rate among the philosophers was higher in proportion than that in any other section of the community. That is not surprising since they hypocritically professed to have life's answers, but did not!

These men were the greatest brains and they had come against a brick wall and they could not go further. So they just 'copped out' in uncertainty, in despair, in cynicism and scepticism and in final hopelessness.

Paul describes the fruit of such individuals who reject God's truth and approve of wickedness while claiming to have life's answers. I have used a lot of very familiar common scriptures today that are very hard hitting in light of the information that we are looking at about the society that we have to resist.

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Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

That is because they rejected God's standard of righteousness.

Romans 1:29-32 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Athens was a sea of evil influence! As became true of Rome, and later of Paris, London, and today of New York City!

What was the result of all of this? It was a collapse. We have heard of the great achievements of humanity through the ages and yet we read books today about the collapse of empires. Two very well known books are:

"The Glory that WAS Greece." Now full of ruins and it has become a little and comparatively unimportant nation that once dominated the world!

"The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." Now only seen in ruins scattered from the Middle East to Britain!"

Sue and I visited Hadrian's Wall in England and it is just ruins, but it was a major accomplishment that the Romans built because they were terrified of the Picts and later the Scots so they built this high wall to keep them out. That was the powerful Roman empire and now it is just ruins overgrown with grass, still impressive to this day. But the society collapsed.

The great humanly admired societies to which humanity has always been ready to trust, eventually pass away entirely! But the same influence remains because man relies on man for answers to his questions and for solutions to his problems.

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So, now turn with me to Ecclesiastes so we can see the words of a wise man who saw society for what it was.

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it;

The reason for this is that man cannot understand the true meaning of life, unless God reveals it to him. So we see society without God's revelation, and God's church with God's revelation a totally different set of societies. We have God's society and the world's society and they are not the same in any way.

So, today we have taken a quick glance at the condition of society.

What is the contrast to all this? There is great Athens and here comes this little man, the apostle Paul who to those intellectuals was unimpressive—this man that they dismissed as a babler. The contrast between the Greek scholars and Paul was not one of ability and understanding and education. Paul was one of the greatest intellects the world has ever known! Those philosophers could not see that. Simply read his epistles to see the depth of his spiritual understanding. The philosophers may have had some physical knowledge, but Paul had the revelation of

God and he had that spiritual understanding.

What is the contrast then? It is not a matter of ability—the philosophers had ability—Paul had ability. What makes a man of God is not ability. Paul was as able as any of the philosophers. They rejected God's truth, but he believed it. That is nothing to do with ability! That is nothing to do with secular knowledge. It is something entirely different and it is something else!

But, you will have to wait until my next sermon to find out what that something else is! In preparing this I had more information than I could get into one sermon and so we will continue with the more positive side of this.