

Confronting a Christless Culture

Acts 17:1-34

"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" - Tertullian (c. 160-225 AD)

"Good philosophy must exist ... because bad philosophy needs to be answered." - C.S. Lewis

Paul proved in Acts 17 that the message of the gospel never changes, but methods do. We will be able to learn **four discoveries** about our Gospel message from this chapter.

I. THE **ROADMAP** FOR OUR GOSPEL MESSAGE (v.1-15)

1) THESSALONICA (v.1-9)

- Spiritual success led to spiritual opposition.
- They made false accusations: *"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too"* (Acts 17:6)
- They applied political pressure: *"These are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar"* (Acts 17:7)
- *When the gospel advances, expect the enemy to counterattack. Opposition often means you're making progress!*



2) BEREIA (v.10-15)

- The Bereans were *"more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."* (Acts 17:11)
- Some audiences are more receptive than others. Don't take rejection personally. There are "Bereans" out there, hungry for God's Word.
- However, *"when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds."* (Acts 17:13)
- *Sometimes God uses opposition to position us exactly where He wants us. Paul's forced departure led him to Athens - the intellectual capital of the world!*

II. THE **RIVALS** OF OUR GOSPEL MESSAGE (v.16-21)

Acts 17:16 says that Paul's spirit was "provoked." Greek Scholar Kenneth Wuest says his spirit was irritated. Paul was angered when he saw all 30,000 of these false deities in the city of Athens. The Greek word is *paroksuno*, from which we get our word "paroxysm." It means "sudden, violent emotion." Paul was filled with a combination of anger and grief.

1) Paul Was Provoked By The Ideas That **Deceived** Them (v.18)

- The **Epicureans** said everything happens by chance, there's no afterlife, so "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." Today's Epicureans are atheists who say **"Enjoy life!"**
- The **Stoics** said everything is god, fate controls everything, so "grin and bear it." Today's Stoics are New Age people who say **"Endure life!"**
- Paul's response to both: **"JESUS IS LIFE!"**

2) Paul Was Provoked By The Idols That **Distracted** Them (v.16, 21)

We have the same gods today, just different names:

- **Mammon** (money) - Jesus said you cannot worship God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). Why do drug dealers push drugs? Money. Why do pornographers exploit women? Money. Why do gambling businesses create millions of losers for every winner? Money.
- **Bacchus** (partying) - Our happy hour culture, club scene, and entertainment industry that promises fulfillment through pleasure and escape from reality.
- **Aphrodite** (lust) - The pornography industry, the hookup culture, the sexualization of everything from car commercials to children's entertainment.

III. THE **REALITY** OF OUR GOSPEL MESSAGE (v.22-31)

1) We are **AWARE** of God as CREATOR (v.22-25). He told them, "I know you are very religious" (v.22).

2) We are **ATTRACTED** to God as REDEEMER (v.26-29). "groping after" (v.27) really means "seeking after".

3) We are **ACCOUNTABLE** to God as JUDGE (v.30-31). "He commands everyone to repent."

IV. THE **RESPONSE** TO OUR GOSPEL MESSAGE (v.32-34)

1) Some **MOCKED** (v.32a) They ridiculed and scoffed at the gospel.

2) Some **DELAYED** (v.32b) "We will hear you again" - sounds good but represents procrastination.

3) Some **BELIEVED** (v.34) "Some men joined him and believed" - including Dionysius and Damaris.

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY:

1) **Don't Let Waiting Time Become Wasted Time.** Paul was supposed to wait for his team, but he couldn't remain passive when confronted with spiritual darkness. Sometimes God uses our "waiting periods" as ministry opportunities.

2) **Stay Provoked by Sin.** We need holy anger at our culture's rebellion against God, not comfortable acceptance with sin. See also **2 Peter 2:7-8**.

3) **Expect Different Responses.** Don't be upset when you don't have 100% acceptance in your witnessing efforts. Paul had some mock him and delayed their decision. However, some believed. Praise the Lord.