

Summit Woods Baptist Church
First Corinthians Sermon Study Equipping Class

Acts 17:16-34 – Evangelism

❖ Day 1

Read Acts 17:16-34.

For these lessons, the sermon text is provided in a format that visually helps display the structure of the paragraph or section of text. The main verbs are underlined. Generally, the main indicative clauses remain to the left, and the supporting clauses are either directly underneath when they have equal priority to what comes before, or are tabbed to the right when the clause supports, develops, or draws a conclusion from a neighboring clause.

¹⁶Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens,
his spirit was provoked within him

as he saw that the city was full of idols.

¹⁷ So he reasoned
in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons,
and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.
And some said,

“What does this babbler wish to say?”

Others said,

“He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”
—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ And they took him
and brought him to the Areopagus, saying,

“May we know
what this new teaching is that you are presenting?”

²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears.

We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”

²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time
in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, ... said:

[standing in the midst of the Areopagus*,]

“Men of Athens, I perceive that
in every way you are very religious.

²³ For as I passed along
and observed the objects of your worship,
I found also an altar with this inscription:

‘To the unknown god.’

What therefore you worship as unknown,
this I proclaim to you.

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it,
being Lord of heaven and earth,
does not live in temples made by man,

²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything,
since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

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²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind
to live on all the face of the earth,
having determined allotted periods
and the boundaries of their dwelling place,
²⁷ that they should seek God,
and perhaps feel their way toward him
and find him.
Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for
““In him we live and move and have our being’;
as even some of your own poets have said,
““For we are indeed his offspring.’
²⁹ Being then God's offspring,
we ought not to think that
the divine being is like gold or silver or stone,
an image formed by the art and imagination of man.
³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked,
But now he commands all people everywhere to repent,
³¹ because he has fixed a day
on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed;
and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”
³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead,
some mocked.
But others said,
“We will hear you again about this.”
³³ So Paul went out from their midst.
³⁴ But some men joined him
and believed,
among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite
and a woman named Damaris
and others with them.

*note that the Areopagus (literally, Ares Hill to the Greeks; aka Mars Hill to the Romans) is both a location and a city council, so named because it historically met in that location, similar to the way we use Capitol Hill.

1. What provoked Paul's spirit and motivated him to reason (verse 17), converse (verse 18), and preach (verse 18)?
2. Was this a typical or an unusual thing for Paul to do when entering a city? (Look at the beginnings of chapters 17 and 18.)

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3. With whom and where did he reason, converse, and preach?
4. With whom and where does most of the action in this passage take place?
5. What was the initial reaction to Paul's words in the marketplace?
6. In verses 16-21, what was the key thing Paul talked about that they found to be strange?
7. Were all of those who wanted to hear more from Paul sincerely interested in the content of his message? From where in the text do you get your answer?
8. In verse 22, how did Paul describe the men of Athens, and how did he use this to lead into a gospel presentation?
9. Did the Athenians think that their knowledge of their own gods was complete? From where in the text do you get your answer? And how did this provide a useful opening for the gospel?

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❖ Day 2

Read Acts 17:16-34 again.

10. What was the first thing he told them about the one true God?
11. Throughout this week's passage, what else did Paul say to distinguish the one true God as different from their many gods?
12. Did Paul only argue from the Scriptures? What else did he use?
13. Why should being created by God, or as their poets put it, "being ... God's offspring," cause them "not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone"?
14. Does the maker of a thing have rights over and a claim to what he has made?
15. For what purpose did God make mankind, and from where in the text do you get your answer?
16. Did God's "overlook[ing]" of ignorance mean that God approved of ignorance? In context, what was Paul's point?

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17. What did Paul specifically point out about God to reinforce the importance of obeying God's command to repent?
18. What did Paul specifically point out about Jesus to prove that He is God's appointed judge?
19. What three categories of response did Paul's mention of the resurrection receive in the end?
20. Compare the final responses (verses 32-34) of those listening to Paul to their initial responses (verses 18-19).

❖ Day 3

Read Acts 17:16-34 again.

21. Was being mocked a sign of failure on Paul's part? Explain.
22. What makes a witnessing or preaching encounter successful?
23. How can discovering an area of ignorance or curiosity in a person's beliefs provide a helpful avenue to begin to share the gospel?

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24. How can someone go too far in trying to make connections between biblical truth and secular beliefs or materials?
25. Is it necessary to know much about a person's life, history, culture, and worldview before sharing the gospel with him or her?
26. How can it be helpful in evangelizing someone to know some things about that person, and how could thinking that it is *necessary* to know specific things about a person be a hindrance to evangelism?
27. What is your typical response when you see people who do not rightly honor God? Is your heart provoked into action the way Paul's was?

In preparation for Sunday, pray that we would be sharpened in our understanding of evangelism and provoked to faithfully witness for Christ.