



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

Acts 17:10-34, Acts 18:1-22

Paul in Athens and Corinth

Paul continues to spread the Gospel in Macedonian-Greek locations.

Paul in Berea, 17:10-15

In Berea, Paul met with a positive welcome (vv. 10-12)—the Jews were "more noble." The Bereans were eager and zealous, "examining" the Scriptures, which would have meant all the OT texts about the coming Messiah and Paul's claims that this is Jesus. But a strident fact remained: Paul was being pursued by those who opposed him, as the Jews of Thessalonica came and stirred up trouble (v. 13). The church leaders sent Paul away and he traveled to Athens.

Paul in Athens, 17:16-34

Athens was the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world. It was a city filled with idols to the Greco-Roman gods. Paul's reaction was one of indignation, anger and revilement. His response, however, was to proclaim the Gospel in the synagogues and in the agora (the marketplace) of Athens. He also met with the Epicurean and the Stoics. Some declared him to be a "babbler" (a "seed picker, a scarp monger"), who does not know what he is talking about. But others realized Paul was discussing some new god and his divine activity, which they do not recognize ("foreign divinities"). Therefore, they invited him to the Areopagus ("Mars Hill"), where the town council met and dealt with city life issues, education, and heard philosophical lectures and religious discourses.

Paul's address was masterful. His argument is easy to trace and easy to understand. He met these Greco-Roman thinkers on their home turf. He used their language, quoted from their philosophers and offered to us a model of contextualization. Below is the summary of his argument and the actual text in Acts 17.

Paul in Athens is an amazing example of cultural engagement. He challenged the way that the Athenians were living, but he also stressed the Gospel as an invitation to a new life, one that made points of contact with the desires that already existed in that culture. Paul knew the message but he also knew the people to whom he was offering the message. Paul's ability to adapt made him effective in God's service. Furthermore, Paul used key elements of theology to present the Gospel: God is the Creator and Sustainer of life; God is sovereign over the

nations and overall humanity. Therefore, humanity is accountable to Him.

It is clear from chapter 17 that Paul hated the pervasive idolatry of Athens. Yet, he was still able to love and connect with that society. Often, we are so angry with our society that we do not show the love and sensitivity that Paul did in Athens. Paul knew how to confront—with honesty and grace!

Paul in Corinth, 18:1-17

Paul traveled to Corinth and met with Priscilla and Aquila, tentmakers and/or leatherworkers from Rome. They were forced to leave Rome because of the edict of Caesar Claudius in AD 49, which expelled Jews from Rome due to riots over “Chrestus.” Paul began his ministry in Corinth at the synagogue, where he engaged in a robust debate with the Jews trying to “persuade” them that Jesus was their Messiah. But the result was substantial opposition. So, in a symbolic gesture, Paul shook the dust off his garments and declared that his opponents were responsible and culpable for their rejection—“your blood be upon your heads.” [See Luke 10:11 and Ezekiel 33:1-7]. His ministry was now directed at the Gentiles.

Luke mentions only two converts—Titius Justus, a “God-fearer,” who lived near the synagogue, and Crispus, a synagogue ruler who came to faith. A vision from the Lord instructed Paul to stay and continue to preach, for the Lord promised protection from harm. Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months.

While Gallio was proconsul, the Jews launched a united attack against Paul, bringing him to the *bema* seat for judgment. (Gallio was the son of Seneca and a virulent anti-Semite). The charge of the Jews about Paul was that he was preaching a faith not recognized as legitimate by the Roman Empire. Gallio does not allow Paul to speak; instead he issued his verdict: There was no wrongdoing, no fraudulent crime. In his judgment, this was a dispute about words, names and Jewish law. No crime has been committed and, from Gallio’s ruling, Christians were not a legal threat to Rome. As a matter of state policy, Rome did not meddle in matters of the religious practices of particular groups. He dismissed the accusers from the court, driving them out of the tribunal: Jews and Christians must settle these issues among themselves.

Some in Corinth took matters into their own hands and, in acts of vigilantism, seized Sosthenes and beat him. Gallio showed total indifference and did nothing!

Questions:

- In Acts 17:10, we read that the Bereans examined (studied) the Scriptures to verify the truthfulness of what Paul was declaring about Jesus. Are you examining and studying the Scriptures to verify the claims being made in our culture? When facing an issue or a crisis, is the first question you ask: “Has God spoken to this matter?”

- Study Paul's discourse on Mars Hill. Did Paul understand the worldview of his audience? How did he build bridges to that worldview? What does that say about our task today?
- In Athens Paul was angry and disgusted with the pervasive idolatry there. How did he respond? Note with a demeanor of grace and honesty. How would you apply that today?
- At the end of his discourse in Athens there were three types of response to the Gospel. Do you see these three responses today in how people respond to the Gospel?

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