

Readings

Scripture

¹⁶ Now 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, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "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. 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.

- Acts 17:16-34 (English Standard Version)

Sermon Outline

How would you define your culture?
Acts 17:16-34

The Acts of the Apostles
Brad Anderson

Because the gospel message both transcends and invades every aspect of culture, we are called to apply the gospel message across every area of life.

What questions does Acts 17 invite us to ask when considering how the gospel applies to various cultures?

What is culture? (Acts 17:16-21)

How do we present Jesus within a unique cultural setting given our unique cultural blind spots? (Acts 17:22-31)

- Learn
 - Plunder
 - Expose
 - Compel
-

Why are the responses always mixed? (Acts 17:32-34)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the *Serendipity Study Bible for Groups*)

- If someone made a statue of you, what pose would be most appropriate? What inscription?
- To be noticed by these Greek philosophers, how extensive must Paul's activity have been?
- What are these philosophers like (Acts 17:18-21)?
- The Stoics believed "god" was in everything and so everything was "god" (pantheism), while the Epicureans had little or no belief in "god" at all. What does Paul emphasize about God in Acts 17:23-30? How does Paul use their own culture to help them see the weaknesses in the way they relate to deity?
- How is this sermon different from that in Acts 13:16-41? Why? Is his lack of using Scripture in chapter 17 a strength or a weakness? Why? How are the sermons alike in terms of what they teach about Jesus? In what they call people to do?
- How does the response in Athens (Acts 17:21, 32-34) compare with Berea (Acts 17:12) and Thessalonica (Acts 17:4)?
- What distresses you spiritually about the area in which you live? What specific needs do you see? What do you feel God is calling you to do about them?
- Who do you know that has very little or no background in the gospel? How would your witness to them be different than to someone out of a Christian background?
- Paul uses idols and Greek poetry as points of contact between these people and the gospel. How might you use movies, books, TV shows, music, etc. as a way of relating the gospel more effectively to others today?