

8-22-21 Paul the Babler

Acts 17:16-34.

Read verses 16.

Paul traveled to Athens without Silas and Timothy. This was about a 250-mile journey. The scripture says that as he **“waited for them at Athens his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.”**

One ancient writer said there was believed to be upwards of 30,000 gods in Athens. Another historian said it was easier to find a god than a man downtown.

The scripture says Paul was **“provoked”** meaning to be deeply troubled, deeply distressed, or severe emotion concern. The KJV says, **“his spirit stirred in him.”** How do we respond when our spirit is provoked, stirred, deeply troubled? What did Paul do?

John 3:19-20, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

“Those living in the light will be provoked by the darkness.”

Read verse 17.

He rolled up his sleeves and got to work. The scripture says that he **“reasoned”** in the synagogue and in the marketplace daily with whomever was there. Paul engaged in conversation and discussions. But his conversation wasn't about the weather of who was going to win in the Colosseum events. He was having daily conversations and discussions about Jesus and the gospel. How do I know that?

Read verse 18.

The Epicureans were atheists; they denied God's existence. They didn't believe in the afterlife. They were content to just live for today we might call them materialists. Their motto was, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” There are still plenty of Epicureans around today right here in Oneida County.

The Stoics were pantheists they believed that everything is God, and that He does not exist as a separate entity but is in the rocks and trees and every material thing. Their attitude toward life was one of ultimate resignation they prided themselves on their ability to take whatever came their way. Their motto was, “Grin and bear it.” Apathy was regarded as the highest virtue in life. Do you know anyone like that today?

Read verses 18-21.

The Epicureans, who were atheists, treated Paul with utter disdain. The word babblers is literally a “seed-picker.” They saw Paul as one of the little birds in the marketplace going around pecking at seeds here and there. In their minds, Paul was little more than a collector of fragments of truth, and they dismissed him.

The Stoics were interested. In their theology, they had some room for additional gods. They were intrigued. I love Luke’s commentary the people spent their time doing nothing but talking and listening to the latest ideas sounds like all media and the government doesn’t it?

Can you imagine Paul’s face when they brought him to the “supreme court” of Athens and asked him, “May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?” I imagine he was grinning from ear to ear.

Paul was living out his motto, **1 Corinthians 9:22**, “**to the weak I became [h]as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.**”

Let’s notice how Paul witnessed to this audience of the most intellectual men in that day.

I. Paul was courteous.

- **Read verse 22.**
- What a great approach. Paul started right where his listeners were. He didn’t denounce them or attack their idolatry. In fact, he paid them a compliment. He basically said, “As I’ve been walking around your city, I’ve noticed one thing about you: You are a very religious people.”
- To Paul, the Athenians were like blind men groping in the dark towards a God they did not know and could not find. But no kind person makes fun of the blind.
- Write it down in large letters: **You cannot insult a person into the Kingdom of God.**
- Paul didn’t begin by saying, “I’ve come to expose your sins, you dirty, wretched, hell-bound, idol-worshipping, heathenistic pagans. Thank God I’m here because I’m going to lead you to Jesus.”
- Are you courteous when you spend time with people who are not Christians yet? Or are you secretly angry with them because of some of the things they do?
- Are you kind and gracious or are you abrasive? Non-believers can pick up on our attitudes, so we need to be careful.

II. Paul found common ground.

- **Read verse 23.**

- He established some common ground with his listeners. Here's another way to say it: When he was courteous, he broke down barriers; he put himself on the same playing field as them, this built bridges to the heart of his audience.
- How many Christians have been around other believers that are so righteous and holier than thou that you can't find common ground with? Now imagine how hard it is for someone who isn't saved to find it with them.
- **“For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship...”** Paul was out among the people, rubbing elbows, hanging out and conversating with them.
- By doing this it demonstrated an interest in the people of Athens. This is a key principle, isn't it? You've got to get to know people if you want to talk to them intelligently. I say often, we must earn the right to sit at their table. “People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”
- Also, by doing this Paul was passing through he was looking for connectors, bridges to their world to the gospel. Missionaries do this all the time when they hit the missions field. They listen to native beliefs, while providing for an area of need, this builds the bridge to connect the gospel.
- Are you spending enough time with non-Christians? Do you know what their interests are? Do you know what they are concerned about? Do you know those things that make them happy? The things that make them cry. Have you discovered any idols in their hearts? Find some common ground, be a listening ear, find ways to serve them and the Holy Spirit will start taking down barriers.

III. Paul was Bold.

- **Read verses 24-30.**
- Paul tactfully tells them they don't know what they are talking about—which is literally true. It's as if he is saying, “You admit there is a God you don't know. Very well, then. I happen to know that God and I will now proclaim him to you.
- How could they be offended when he starts by quoting from one of their own altars “To the unknown God?” By admitting there is more to God than they know, they have opened the door for Paul to preach the gospel boldly.
- Finding common ground doesn't mean you compromise your values. Paul here isn't compromising anything. He's just finding a way to gain a hearing with these highly intelligent people.

- In **verses 24-25**, Paul gives them a theology lesson, boldly speaking of God as the Creator and the Giver of all things.
- Paul also says that our great God is close to man, if man reaches for Him, He is available **(v.27)**.
- **Verse 30** shows us the depth of Paul's courageousness: In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Paul is mincing no words here.

"Instead of assuming that people don't want to hear the gospel, try instead to assume that they will be interested in the good news. Your friend may have just gone through circumstances that have prepared his heart to receive Jesus Christ. God may have been leading him into an awareness of his need for truth. Perhaps he has felt especially alone -- or in need of love."

IV. Paul pointed them to Jesus.

- **Read verse 31.**
- Paul was not afraid to speak of an inescapable day of judgment. He did not shrink from speaking the truth about the resurrection of Jesus, even though he knew that many of his listeners would not want to hear it.
- We must not shrink from speaking about Jesus. He is the only way to peace with God and people must believe in Him in order to be saved. Paul said it strongly in **1 Corinthians 1:22-23: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified."**
- As God gives you opportunity, speak boldly for Christ. Tell people about His death so they understand that Jesus died in their place and that they can be forgiven for all the sins they have committed. Tell them about His resurrection so that they can have hope for eternity. Tell them about the love and peace and joy that will be theirs once they surrender to Christ.

There were and still are 3 responses.

Response #1 is found in **verse 32**. When they heard the truth about the God they didn't know, some **"mocked"**.

Response #2 is also found in **verse 32**. **"We will hear you again on this matter."** Others were curious. Their appetites were whetted, and they told Paul that they wanted to hear more.

Response #3 is found in **verse 34**. "However, some men joined and believed..."

This is what we can expect when we are involved in the lives of lost people. Some will become agitated, mock and sneer at the gospel. Others will be curious, might need to hear it again or more explanation, or more time for the Holy Spirit to work. And some will become convinced and commit themselves to Christ.

Conclusion

How people respond to the gospel is God's responsibility. Remember the words from **Acts 2:47**, **"The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."**

Have you trusted in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

How I respond to God is my responsibility. "He saved us to do a work through us!"