

## ACTS 17:13-18

- A. In Acts 17:11-12, we saw that the people of Berea were smart and open-minded concerning the scriptures. They evaluated each speaker at the synagogue by studying the scriptures and then comparing the message to the Word.
1. What Paul taught must have surprised them (gospel of grace and not Law salvation), but they did not shake their heads or refuse to consider Paul's Christ-given message. They knew it was different, but they were confident enough in their knowledge of scripture to give Paul an honest and sincere hearing.
  2. This openness is lacking in the church today. For years Christendom, with all of its sects, have developed their own theology-dogma. For anything to enter contrary to their denominations' or schools' beliefs, they have gone on attack mode to defend their churches and schools. This is understandable to a point. However, they have made ruthless attacks through pulpits, print, media, by verbally and personally tearing down others - even among themselves.  
  
\*This has resulted in divisions, schisms, name-denouncing, and character assassination to disgrace and discredit contrary voices.  
  
\*\*Example: Dr. Ironside's treatment of Dr. Stam and dispensational teaching.
  3. Today when most church leaders hear something different about beliefs, their first thought is to conform to their church's denominational and traditional beliefs. That is not all bad, unless it is not according to God's Word.
    - a. Remember, being open-minded is not being gullible. Those at Berea were not willing to accept Paul's message just because he said it. They listened to his message and considered it, but not without Scripture evidence. Paul's message had to be subjected to the Word of God.
    - b. Note: Never be afraid of truth, nor even error, when it is placed under the scrutiny and search-light of scripture.
    - c. Also remember, those who reject light/truth and refuse to even search the scriptures to see if what is being said is true or not, usually accept without question what their orthodox leaders and traditions have taught them. They are very suspicious of other teachers, yet protective of their own.  
  
\*\*It is almost like a "we are right and everyone else is wrong" attitude. But if Paul's message was subjected to God's Word, who do we think we are?
    - d. We cannot be afraid of scriptural examination of our teaching and beliefs. If our beliefs are true, nothing will shake us from them.  
  
Spurgeon: (paraphrased) - The mark of a spiritual minister is when he sees he has been in error, he doesn't allow his pride to keep him in error, but yields and changes to the Word's truth.  
  
\*The purity of the Church doctrinally does not depend upon loyalty to church dogma or tradition, but upon what saith the Scriptures!

4. When it says [they searched the scriptures], it does not mean since they studied the O.T. that Paul did **not** preach "the gospel of the grace of God". Three chapters later, Paul says in Acts 20:24 - [ But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.]

a. Paul did preach Christ's special revelation given to him by Christ. It was somewhat **limited** at first, but always the gospel. Remember, he had left Thessalonica before coming to Berea. Notice what he said to the Thessalonians later, about when he was with them **prior** to going to Berea.

I Thessalonians 1:5 - For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

b. These at Berea not only believed, but because of their insistence upon an intelligent faith and understanding of Paul's message, they not only believed but their **faith** was made stronger by their proving it scripturally.

\*\*Isn't it better in our salvation experience to have an understanding of truth conviction rather than just an **emotional** response? \*Billy Graham!

B. 1. The Jews who had run Paul out of Thessalonica (17:5-10) hear of Paul's success in Berea. These

Acts 17:13-14 - But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. Acts 17:14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

bitter-envious-jealous Jews cannot let it go. So they go to Berea and create trouble there by stirring up the people about Paul, as they had done in Thessalonica.

a. Their hardened hearts and hostility kept them in darkness spiritually, but also they **hindered** others from hearing and believing the truth.

b. It is a shame because they had the O.T. scriptures and could have studied like those at Berea to determine truth. **Religion blinds** and says: "Don't confuse me with the **facts**!"

2. Immediately the believers at Berea (as in Philippi and Thessalonica) sent Paul away to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained. The believers had decided Paul was in present danger and too valuable to **lose**. It was best for him to leave right then.

\*\*Though reluctant to leave, he knew the importance of their decision. Paul still had revelation to come to him from Christ. At this point in time, Paul had not written **one** book yet. He had much to do, so he left from this imminent danger.

C. \*Paul was escorted by some believers to the sea, where they sailed to Athens, Greece - about **300** miles

Acts 17:15 - And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

away. This was Paul's first time to be **alone** on his mission journeys. Paul tells his escort that when they return to Berea to tell Silas and Timothy to rejoin him in Athens as soon as possible.

D. Acts 17:16 - Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

1. Athens is the most celebrated city in Greece. Dr. Stam says: "It was the center of mythology. From its harbor you could see the Parthenon, the Greek temple of Athena." \*Most religions were represented there.
2. As Paul waits (probably **depressed**), he is stirred by seeing all the altars of pagan gods that the people worshipped. Athenians were so fearful of missing a God that they built an altar to "The **Unknown** God".  
\*Paul's spirit ignited with **brokenness** as he saw such idolatry and darkness.
3. Dr. Stam told of what a man in Nero's time said: "Athens contained over 3000 gods, plus idols that individuals possessed. He said it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens!"
4. [wholly given to idolatry] Unbelief, deepened **depravity**, not having the One and true God, created an empty hole in them and they tried to fill it with the lowest vulgar immorality - shown by their **many** statues.

E.

Acts 17:17 - Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

1. Because of what he saw (idolatry), Paul attends a local synagogue service. He is chomping at the bit to speak for God again. He **denounces** the silence of the Jews who lived in the midst of such blatant idolatry. Why hadn't they made their faith in the one true God public? These Jews were evidently **content** to be religious and were not obeying the commandments.  
Exodus 20:3-4 - Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Exo. 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth:  
\*They were giving these Gentiles the opportunity to belittle their God, as if He did **not** exist.  
Romans 2:23-24 - Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? Rom. 2:24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.
2. Paul sees this and becomes **hot**, excited, upset, and had no problem finding listeners in the marketplace. Most Athenians liked to listen, argue, and philosophize about any doctrine (teaching). So Paul began to speak up in the synagogue and market, wherever he could get an open ear. So much for **waiting** for Silas and Timothy.
3. Paul still went to the Jew first, but God was transitioning from Israel to the Body Church. Though God had **temporarily** set aside His favored nation, He would not announce that until the Jews from Jerusalem to Rome had an opportunity individually to turn to Christ.

Note Paul's message in Acts:

Acts 13:38-39 - Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: Acts 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

4. In verse 17, it says [devout persons]. These were Gentiles that came to reverence the true God of Israel, but had not become Jewish proselytes (**Rahab** - Cornelius).

F. Acts 17:18 - Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

1. Athens had one of the greatest universities in the world. Many teachers and students went there to search for knowledge. In their spare time, they would gather in the center of the city to discuss different matters of religions and philosophies.

\*\*Evidently, when Paul was preaching God's truth some of these philosophers joined the street audience.

2. There were two particular groups of two rival schools.

a. The Epicureans - They taught that God, or gods, were not interested in humans. These gods lived far out in space and thus were not valuable. The happiness of men and women depended upon self-effort and pleasure. It was to be free from anything that disturbed the human spirit. There was nothing beyond the grave, so nothing was to alarm (no judgment). Most gave their lives over to sensuality and vice. Their philosophy gave them free license to indulge in self-gratification (whatever their flesh desired).

b. The Stoics - Their belief was opposite of the Epicureans. They believed God was material... trees, plants, animals, mountains, fields, and in people. To have ultimate happiness was to be at peace with the world and everything in it. Thus, they were pantheists and fatalists that taught virtue was man's chief end. They tried to suppress all feeling and to accept fate calmly so they could be the masters rather than slaves of circumstances.

(1) \*This was/is man's attempt to make the most of himself - by himself! This produced little Pharisees who looked down upon any who displayed emotion - weeping or rejoicing.

Romans 12:15 - Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

(2) So with the Epicureans, there was lustful pleasure and with the Stoics, there was haughty pride.

3. As Paul preached about Christ, these two groups couldn't believe what they were hearing. They had never heard a message like Paul's grace gospel!

\*They asked: What did [this babblers say?]

a. They were saying Paul just went around picking up ideas, seeds of information from others and then used them as his own to make a living. This man doesn't know what he's talking about!

b. Paul presenting this new message to them was strange, but evidently Paul's arguments for the true God had attracted these two groups to listen with others. Of course, we know the real reason for this.

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

I Thessalonians 2:13 - For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

II Thessalonians 2:13 - But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: