

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter 17

- In verses 1-2, we see Paul entering a Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica where he reasoned with them on three Sabbaths.
 - It is important to note the phrase, “as was his custom”. What does this say regarding Paul’s observance of the Sabbath?
- Verse 2 states that he “reasoned with them from the Scriptures”.
 - What were the Scriptures he used?
 - What was the content of the message that he demonstrated from those Scriptures?
 - What does this say about the value of those Scriptures and their ability to establish the gospel message?

- According to verse 4, how effective was his message?
 - It appears that Paul had greater success with bringing in a large number of God-fearing gentiles than with the Jewish population.
- According to verse 5, were these “unpersuaded Jews” acting in line with civility and grace or something else?
- What do you make of the phrase describing the Apostles as, “These who have turned the world upside down”?
 - How was the gospel message seen as an upending of people’s pet theologies and philosophies and counter to the cultural norms of the day?
 - If the gospel message was at odds with cultural norms almost 2,000 years ago, how much more so is that true today?
 - These troublemakers sought to continue their persecution of the believers through the prevailing Roman legal system. How is such “lawfare” being used today in our own culture, rather than dealing with a fact-based dialogue and honest debate?

- According to verse 10, Paul and Silas were forced to escape to Berea to avoid further persecution.
- In verse 11 we see that the Jewish people in the Berean synagogue are described as “more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”
 - How important is “teachability” in terms of understanding?
 - What were the Scriptures that these noble Bereans examined?
 - How foundational to faith is that particular body of Scripture?
 - Can you envision a time when that particular body of Scripture would no longer hold authority as the standard of faith? If so, what does that mean for the continuity and permanence of our faith?
 - If these noble students of the Word had found a discrepancy between Paul’s teaching and the written Scriptures, would they have continued to receive his teaching?

- Paul's claims were checked against this standard, how important is it for today to use the same standard to test the claims of current theologians and Bible teachers?
- If the teaching and theology of modern Bible teachers is not in line with this same standard, what should be our response?
- According to verse 13, the Jews of Thessalonica who had previously troubled Paul and Silas were not content to leave them alone after they had left. As soon as they heard of their work in Berea, they came there to cause further trouble.
 - The text records that he left Silas and Timothy behind to continue teaching the congregation hoping that his departure would draw away the focus of the agitators.
 - Why do you suppose there was so much fleshly hostility directed to Paul?
 - Do you see similar reactive hostility to the gospel message today?
- In verse 16, we see Paul arriving in Athens, a prominent

city wholly devoted to the pantheon of Greek gods and a cosmopolitan center of many competing ideologies and philosophies.

- How does that description fit many of our modern cities and educational institutions today?
- What was the cause of Paul's spirit being provoked within him?
- Do you have a similar reaction to seeing idolatry in our own modern culture?
- Paul attempted to channel his inner provocation into action.
 - What did he do?
 - Did he restrict his activities to the synagogue only?
 - The "Epicurians" were largely focused on indifference that led to self-indulgence.
 - The "Stoics" were largely focused on a discipline of self-denial of pleasure.
- According to verses 19-20, were these philosophers eager to hear more from Paul?

- What did they do?
- How does verse 21 explain their interest?
- In his previous teaching within synagogues, Paul had the advantage of a common source of authority, namely the Torah, upon which to base his claims regarding Yeshua and the gospel. There was a wealth of information to draw upon to establish a basis for his message. When attempting to communicate directly with the pagan world, he had no such “common ground” of agreement.
 - How prepared are you to be able to “contextualize” the gospel message so that your hearers can comprehend the essential message?
- Paul’s attempt to communicate the concepts of the Transcendence and natural revelation about God was designed to create a logical basis for his gospel message. He did not directly attack their systems of belief but tried to find points of commonality.
 - How is that a good example for us to follow as we attempt to bridge the culture gap when sharing the gospel?

- When people feel attacked, do they generally become more or less defensive?
- As people become more defensive, how open are they to further open and honest discussion?
- In verse 28, Paul quotes two pagan philosophers, Epimenides and Aratus.
 - How important might this have been to his hearers to realize he was conversant with their understanding and culture?
 - Can we see the value of Paul's education, under Gamliel, which included Greek language, culture and philosophy?
 - Does a basic knowledge of what other people believe assist us in communicating?
- In terms of overall effectiveness, despite his noble attempts to "contextualize" his message, his efforts were largely unsuccessful.
 - Despite what the numbers may conclude, there were some present who came to faith.

- Should we be discouraged by a lack of favorable response to our message, or should we take encouragement from the few that do come to believe?
- What does this say to modern evangelistic efforts that seem to over-emphasize the “numerical” value of their success?