

## Acts 17 Paul in Athens

As we have seen in recent weeks, Paul was run out of town in Thessalonica so he went to Berea. The reception in Berea was much better until some jealous Jews came from Thessalonica to Berea and stirred up crowds against Paul. Then Paul traveled on to Athens where he waited for his team to catch up with him. Paul's time in Athens gives us a chance to see what he did when he had spare time.

In his spare time, while he was waiting...when he didn't have to travel or lead a Church or write letters to Churches or run from a mob...Paul was a student of the culture. The city was full of idols. How did he know that? He spent time in the city. He walked the city. He got around. He talked to people and he took note of the culture.

It seems that the key to Paul's success as a missionary was that he was a student of Christianity and a student of people. Notice the three different groups of people identified in Acts 17:

- **Jews.** Paul found them in the synagogue.
- **God-Fearing Greeks.** Paul also found them affiliated with the synagogue.
- **Gentiles.** Paul found them in the marketplace.

Learning from Paul and following his example, you could make it a goal to understand the people in your culture ... people you work with, members of your family, your neighbors.

*To get comfortable with yourself as a Christian*, you need to be in the Bible. Try reading Psalm 119 for your devotions. This is a very long Psalm that speaks of the benefits of God's Word.

*To get comfortable with a modest understanding of the culture*, you need to talk to people who are immersed in the culture and not sheltered by a Church. Ask questions. Be interested.

Step back and look at the big picture in Acts. Paul was trained to be a Jewish religious leader and belonged to a group called the Pharisees. The Pharisees were separatists. They separated from impurity, bad theology and Gentiles. So how does Paul know how the Gentiles in Athens think? He's never been to Athens before. He can't rely on his early training because what he heard when he was young was .... Those people are bad. Stay away from those people. Yet he seems to be so good at this. How did Paul get to be good at understanding the way pagans think?

### **Paul was a lifelong student of Christianity and people.**

Paul sees a lot of markers of religious devotion, but he also sees a complete absence of devotion to the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul tells them about Jesus. But why? Why would Paul want to tell these people about Jesus? Because being religious doesn't save people. Being sincere doesn't save people. Being devoted doesn't save people.

Paul was disturbed by the large presence of idols in Athens not because it was offensive to him. Paul was disturbed because people were being deceived and so he tells them about their greatest need.

*"Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God."*  
Bob Pierce, founder of Samaritan's Purse.

### **Home Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Read Acts 17:16-34
2. What are you impressed with about Paul as you read this? What are your impressions of his message?
3. What are some challenges to being a “student of people” and/or a “student of Christianity”?
4. Do you prefer being around Christians or non-Christians? Why?
5. How might Paul’s method be a model for missionaries and Church planters?  
How might Paul’s method be a model for you?
6. How can you develop a heart like Paul’s that was so concerned for people’s spiritual well-being that he intentionally did some things about it?