

# Cross Cultural Evangelism

## Acts 17

**OPENING ILLUSTRATION:** We are talking this AM about taking the Gospel to someone with a completely different worldview.

In order see to how hip we are on culture lets do an exercise: Back when some of you were kids, you dressed up in general: Clown, Cowboy, Indian, Space Man, Ect. Today all that has changed - these days they dress up as a specific character from a particular show or movie.

The worst thing you can say is, “*What are you supposed to be little boy?*” You might as well put a rock in his basket at that point.

**[r u costume savvy game]**

More and more we are living in a Post-Christian culture. Presuppositions are radically different than they were even 20 years ago.

**ILLUSTRATION:** D.A. Carson in a Limo. with a man whose daughter is about to die, parents survived the Holocaust.

Do you know that feeling? When you are talking to someone about the implications of the Gospel and they are on a completely different planet? Or you feel there is a wall up than you just can't seem to cross.

**At one time I could assume that there were certain things were agreed upon: People knew that the bible claimed to be authoritative, Jesus was exclusive, ect.** Those who were atheistic were **atheistic in a Christian context** - it was the Christian God they disbelieved.

Now as Huntsville becomes more of a metropolitan city we are seeing the pace of the change accelerating. And often time there can be *SIGNIFICANT* cultural gaps even in the home.

**BIBLICAL CONTEXT:** The last time we were together we saw Paul and Silas in the city of Phillipi, he left there and passed briefly through THESSALONICA and BEREIA. When Paul came to town he caused either a revival or a riot, often both. The Jews were so upset that they were in hot pursuit of Paul at this point.

**TEXT: Acts 17:14–15 (NASB95)**

<sup>14</sup> Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. <sup>15</sup> Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens;

and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

**So now Paul is alone in Athens.** How much trouble could he possibly cause in Athens?

**Athens** was named for the goddess Athena. It had been the home of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great. In the days of Paul Athens was primarily a University town. At one time it has a **few hundred thousand** residents but by the time Paul arrived it was less than **50,000**.

The Athenians were **Polytheistic** (Believing in many gods) and **Pluralistic** (Believing that each person should worship whatever god they wanted, it really didn't matter).

**Pliny wrote**, "In the time of Nero, Athens had well over **25,000** public statues, and another **30,000** in the Parthenon alone." Someone wrote, "It was easier to find a god than a man in Athens,"

Not only were the false idols but they were of a most vile sort. The idols depicted every form of perversion known to man.

#### **Acts 17:16–21 (NASB95)**

<sup>16</sup> Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

**Paroxu-neto** is the Greek word Luke uses to describe Paul's inner turmoil: It means "to sharpen, to irritate, to stimulate. To be moved to disturbance and bitterness."

<sup>17</sup> So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. <sup>18</sup> And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him.

Now when you think of **philosophy** think of **World view**. That is really what it was in Paul's day. It was a grid through which you made decisions about the issues of life.

- **Epicureans** - Believed in a **plurality** of gods, but believed they were far distant from us, beyond us, not concerned with us. We should **live rationally to maximize our pleasure**. The main problem they faced was death. How can you really enjoy life knowing death was imminent. And who knows what follows death...So they promoted annihilationism.
- **Stoicism** was founded on the teaching of Zeno. The Stoics were **Pantheist**, they believed God was in everything. Stoicism taught that the ideal life was one **free of passion or emotions**. So if you find out that you inherited 5 Million dollars, what difference does that make, it didn't inflame you passions. But if you found out that

you child was murdered on the way home... it was simply the will of the gods you shouldn't become emotional about such things.

What would these Epicurion and Stoics make of Paul's Christianity?  
18b. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?"

**Idle Babblers** - *a picker of seeds. A slang athenian word that means a charlatan that retells scraps of second hand learning. He retells other mens ideas because he is to lazy to have his own.*

Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

Now everyone was interested when anyone promoted **a new god in Athens**. It was really good for business. Typically, it would mean work for the local artisans who would construct a statue, the local builder who would construct a temple, land would need to be acquired for such a structure. Feasts and days of celebration would be instituted to honor this new god.

So he needed to come before the Athenian court of some 30 men, and get his god approved so Jesus can be one more among the 30,000 other gods in Athens.

<sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus

**Areopagus** - this was a stone outcropping just under the acropolis overlooked by the Parthenon. Greek Mythology taught that this was were Aries was put on trial for the murder of Poseidon's son. It was the legal center of Athens.

<sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? <sup>20</sup> "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." <sup>21</sup> (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

NOW, Paul's sermon detailed for us what I believe are **three key principles** for bringing the Gospel to those with a different world view. Let's look at each of them together -

## 1. You must be able to have **Competent Conversations** -

3 illustration from greeks

### a. The Eumenides

**Acts 17:22–34 (NASB95)**

<sup>22</sup> So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are **very religious** in all respects.

Very Religious - He uses an extremely rare Greek word which was used by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus in his play, "The Eumenides (means The Furies)" He was using a buzz word for the Greeks.

**NOTE:** Paul had apparently read The Eumenides.

**ILLUSTRATION:** This was the same pattern set by Billy Graham before he held a Crusade in a city. He researched their arts, their sports, their politics he gave the people he sought to reach the benefit of study.

**Ted Donnelley said,** "He doesn't quote these Greek figures as authorities in their own right, but simply as a point of contact".

### b. Epimenedes

<sup>27</sup> that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup> for in Him we live and move and exist.

**This is quote from a Poem written by a Cretan called Epimenedes** - it was a poem to Zeus. In the poem he is denouncing his fellow Cretans because they said Zeus is buried in Crete and he is explaining that if what they believed about Zeus is true, that saying he is dead and buried is utterly ridiculous.

### c. Stoic Philosopher

28b - as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

This is from poem written by a Stoic philosopher.

So Paul does not begin his sermon by quoting from scripture - what was scripture to them anyway? They had no biblical foundation whatsoever.

**APPLICATION:** Now if you are seeking to reach across a culture to connect someone to the Gospel, take the time to acquaint ourselves with their world view.

This is what I call, developing a missional balance - **you must be able to know the culture without being overly enamored by it.**

Be **IN** the world, yet not **OF** the world.

**Christians tend to respond to culture with one of two extremes:**

1. **Withdraw** - This is the Amish mentality, this is the family who says we are going to homeschool our children, not have cable, wear denim jumpers and wait on the rapture.

**2. Accommodate**- This is where the Christian waves the white flag and says if you can't beat 'em join 'em. And we lose our prophetic voice speaking into the culture calling it to repentance.

Paul offered a third option, **prophetic engagement**.

*Not only was Paul able to have competent conversations...*

## 2. He Recognized the **Cultural Contradictions** -

<sup>23</sup> "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

Because he had a VIVIDLY developed Biblical worldview he was able to clearly spot the inconsistencies in other systems.

**According to the Athenian world view, there was a god for everything.**

- Sea voyage - **Poseidon**, the god of the sea
- Giving a Speech - **Hermes**, the god of communication

Well the thought was, perhaps we have overlooked one of the gods, so just in case let's construct a temple to an unknown god.

**Paul took advantage of the fact that they were open to knowledge they had not acquired.**

**EXAMPLE:** When talking to an **Atheist** it is helpful to establish that they cannot possibly say with certainty that there is NO GOD unless they have **absolute knowledge**, thus making themselves god. Fact is they are more agnostic than atheist, being strongly opposed to the idea of God. At that point the only question is, "Are they **honest agnostics or dishonest agnostics**?" What's the difference? A dishonest agnostic says I will not be convinced and I don't want to see or hear your evidence. An honest agnostic says, "If there is a God and you can somehow reveal him to me, I'm open".

*Look how Paul addresses their contradiction logically...*

<sup>24</sup> "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup> nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; <sup>26</sup> and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,

The Athenians typically held a view that different gods created the different people groups. Each people group thought they were superior based on their particular god. But Paul says, "No, God started with one man and all came from him".

<sup>29</sup> "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

Again this is a use of Greek thought. The argument is simple the **more complex produces the less complex**. So if we are like this it is safe to assume that the Father is greater than us - NOT a block of wood.

**Every world view must answer 4 questions.**

- a. origin
- b. meaning
- c. morality
- d. destiny

If you are going to win you friend to Jesus you must be able to talk competently, accurately understanding how their worldview answers those questions.

**EXAMPLE: Atheistic Evolution** answers the question of origin. But notice that it has no answer for meaning... what is the use of morality... and destiny is a farce. But I have never met an Evolutionist yet who does not hold to some form of morality. Do you see the contradiction?

If there is no reason, no God, no destiny, what reason do I have not to kill you? But you have a moral system, you express moral outrage, why is that? Could it be IMAGO DEA you are an image bearer of God, with his law written on your heart?

**EXAMPLE: Islam** answers origin and destiny but look at it's morality. Sherea Law states that if a woman has been raped she must produce four men as witnesses who suddenly develop a conscience and actually confess to witnessing the rape. If she cannot produce four witnesses she is tried for adultery and flogged.

It that the morality you want?

Did you know that Islam teaches that it is ok to lie in order to further the cause of Islam?

- [Qur'an \(9:3\)](#) - "...Allah and His Messenger are free from liability to the idolaters..."
- [Qur'an \(66:2\)](#) - "Allah has already ordained for you, (O men), the dissolution of your oaths"
- [Qur'an \(3:54\)](#) - "And they (the disbelievers) schemed, and Allah schemed (against them): and Allah is the best of schemers." The Arabic word used here for scheme (or plot) is makara, which literally means deceit. If Allah is deceitful toward unbelievers, then there is little basis for denying that Muslims are allowed to do the same. (See also [8:30](#) and [10:21](#))

This is why Yasser Araphat could sign a Peace accord with Israel, embrace the Prime Minister, Smile on American TV, go home and shout, "Kill the infidels".

*Now this is where Paul makes his turn and brings us to the 3rd principal...*

### 3. Hold the Gospel in **Constant Comparison**

<sup>30</sup> “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should **repent**.

So, Paul is not calling them to tack Jesus on to their pantheon of gods, but to turn, repent, leave their world view and come to Christ.

<sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Now this was utterly ridiculous to their understanding. They understood annihilation - that death is the end of life. They understood becoming one with the cosmic consciousness. But RESURRECTION? Why would God want to let one die and raise him again?

At this point they cut Paul off...

And you will find that the conversation drastically changes when you get to Jesus. People don't mind looking at God as Creator, Ruler, Giver or Controller.

**BUT NONE OF THAT IS SUFFICIENT TO SAVED!**

The Bible teaches even demons believe in God and tremble.

- You can believe in soap and still stink.
- You can believe in soap and die dirty.

**YOU MUST POINT TO JESUS AS REDEEMER!!!**

Make no mistake - we want you believe in God, but belief in God will not save you.

<sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out of their midst. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areo-pagite and a woman named Da-maris and others with them.

Dionysius was apparently on the judging counsel that day in Athens. He was saved and later became the first bishop of Athens.

1 Cor. 16:15 tells us Stephanus and his household were called the first converts in Achaia.

Interestingly, today the **Acropolis is not the highest point in Athens**, there is actually one point higher on it sets a church. 98% of the city of Athens now considers themselves Christian. It all began with one man willing to - 1. Have Competent Conversations, 2. Recognize Cultural Contradictions, 3. Draw a Gospel Comparison.