



**Acts of the Apostles: Acts 17
Lesson 29 by Faber McMullen, Union
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**Three Responses to God's Call &
Direction for Our Lives**



This morning we will look at Paul and Silas as they visit three different cities. In each city, they present the gospel and they are met with three different responses. The Thessalonians meet them with anger. The Bereans responded with an open mind, examining the scriptures daily, and acting upon what they read. They received the gospel and became Christ-Followers. The Athenians responded with a closed mind to the things of the God of Israel. They could not get beyond themselves, their philosophies, and their intellects. We can learn from these accounts how we and others might respond to the call and direction of God in our lives. Please follow along with me in Acts Chapter 17.

In Thessalonica – they responded in anger.

17 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. ⁵ But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” ⁸ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. ⁹ So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. (Acts 17:1-9, NKJV).

So now we see Paul going from Philippi to Thessalonica. That's about 100 miles. There Paul reasoned for 3 weeks with the Jews in the synagogue that Jesus was the Messiah. No doubt he showed them the need for a Savior and Messiah by showing them Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. The text tells us that “some of them were persuaded.” A church was established there with Jews, numerous Greeks, and many strong powerful prominent women. But the majority of the listeners in Thessalonica responded to the gospel message in anger.

The passage tells us that Paul was staying in the house of a Christian brother named Jason. Some jealous Jews got a group together and went to Jason's house basically saying, “These have

turned the world upside down and now they have come here and they're doing the same thing." What a wonderful thing to be accused of! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be guilty of turning Grimes County upside down for Jesus? I wish there was that kind of evidence against me. The believers were accused of "turning the world upside down." It should cause us to pause and remember that in reality it is the world that lives "upside down." People who are living after the flesh are living a life that is upside down. We have a mission to turn the word right side up. It is only Jesus who can take an upside down life and turn it right side up. Anyway, from Thessalonica, we see that often the world responds to the things of God in anger. Paul and Silas are then sent by night to Berea, and the people there have a totally different response to the things of God. Pick up with me and read along at verse 10.

In Berea – they responded with an open mind and searched the scriptures.

¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. (Acts 17:10-15, NKJV).

The text tells us that these people were very different from the Thessalonians. When Paul laid the scriptures before them, they "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." Did you know that is the attitude we are supposed to have today. Some who are Christ-Followers never bother to even pick up God's Word and read it. Some even come to church without bringing their Bibles. How will you know what God is telling you to do if you don't search the Scriptures to find out "if these things are so?" Staying in the Word opens your mind to both the call and direction of God. So many Christians fall prey to different theologies and philosophies because they never measure them against God's word. You can hear apostasy on the TV, the radio, the internet, and from many different places. This group, however, was open-minded and were diligent in searching the scriptures; they responded by believing.

People that are closed-minded can never come to Jesus because their thinking cannot go beyond themselves. I would challenge you if you are not a believer to search the scriptures with an open mind. Don't search them with a mind that is already made up. The Bereans responded with an open mind and in diligently searching the scriptures. The Thessalonians responded in anger, and the Bereans responded by having an open mind and making a decision based upon what they found in the Scriptures. So the lesson there is to be like a Berean! Let's now pick up with verse 16 as Paul makes his way to the great city of Athens.

In Athens – they responded with self-absorption, being impressed by their own intellects and indecision. INDECISION WAS DECISION!

¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. ¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. (Acts 17:16-17, NKJV).

As Paul entered Athens he was stirred up by the wickedness that he saw. This reminds me of how I have felt when I've gone to Las Vegas and a few years ago when I went to San Francisco. I went to areas of those cities that were totally "given over" to the flesh. I'm not talking about some dark area, I'm talking about things I saw going on right in the middle of town. Paul just responded to that by steadily presenting the gospel. Let's pick up with verse 18.



¹⁸ Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?" ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. (Acts 17:18-21, NKJV).

Paul finds himself talking to the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans were a group that had been started several hundred years before this incident. Epicurus taught that pleasure was the primary objective of life, and the greatest way to achieve pleasure was through total simplicity. That's the idea that the simpler you live your life, the more fulfilled you will be. Some of us who have many possessions know the heartache of those possessions owning us in a way. In fact, I am steadily in the process of trying to minimize the amount of what I have and maximize the use of what I have. By this time, Paul is addressing a group that worshipped sensuality. They ate and ate till they vomited. They had sex with anyone and everyone they could find to have sex with. They essentially worshipped pleasure.

The Stoics said the chief good was virtue. But a man cannot know virtue if he is emotionally involved. They sought to have no feelings. They sought to feel no pain, grief, joy, etc. Their goal was to be untouched and unmoved by anything and everything. These philosophies were what Paul encountered. Imagine a group that all had a personality like Spock on the old Star Trek series. These two groups took Paul up to speak in the Aeropagus.



Let me explain the locale of the Areopagus. It was about halfway up the hill that leads to the Parthenon which was on the Acropolis (the top of the city). The Parthenon is the photo to the far left of this text, and looking down you can see the bald rock where the Areopagus used to be (the photo on the right). It was a building sort of like a supreme court

building In that place, scripture tells us that Paul stood in the midst of men who discussed religious matters all day long. I think it is interesting that Paul meets them right where they are. This is how we, as the church, are to reach those whom we evangelize and influence. God gives us the opening when we are open to it. Follow me now from verse 22.

Addressing the Areopagus

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:22-31, NKJV).

Paul says that he recognizes a spiritual hunger in these people like all men have. As he is saying this, he no doubt was pointing to all of those statues and all of those temples that had been built by men groping and searching and seeking to have a real relationship with a real God. And he explains to them that the one true God does not dwell in temples made by men. It is the one true God that has made us all and He has done all of this so that we will seek Him (and grope for Him and find Him). And then Paul says one of the most beautiful things about God. “He is not far from each one of us.” It’s good for us all to remember and realize that day by day, and moment by moment, we stand in His very presence.

Paul explains in detail how unique our God is. He is not a creation of men, rather He Himself is the Creator. He is not shaped by gold, silver, or stone. He explains that these ideas of God are now past and this is the appointed day for everyone to repent. Did you guys know that we’re still living in that day where all men everywhere are commanded to repent? And why are we to repent? We are to repent because there is a coming day of judgment when Jesus will judge the world with righteousness. After explaining this, Paul then points them to the magnificent resurrection of this great Judge who is coming again.

Down below Mars Hill (the Areopagus) there are still the ruins of many temples. Paul said, “The unknown God does not dwell in these temples”. God fills the universe and doesn’t dwell in the structures of men. God is not anywhere. God is EVERYWHERE. God is as much in the trees behind Union Grove as He is in the Whiskey Tango Bar down the road. He is a God that goes

beyond our imagination; He is not worshipped through our handiwork. God is not worshipped with ornate altars and fancy buildings. Yes, He is in Canterbury Cathedral, but He is on the beach. He is in the woods. He is over the rivers and over the mountains. God is omnipresent.

What then, can I give to God that He might need? Well, He doesn't need anything. He is complete. My giving to God benefits me. I make the choice to give Him my life, my will, and my resources. Yet, God doesn't need any of that. God doesn't need anything. I suppose I should be careful, as your pastor, to emphasize that God doesn't need you to be doing this or that. I just need to keep reminding myself and you about all He has done for each of us. It is when I really realize what God has done for me that it makes me want to respond and serve Him. Jesus did it all. True praise is "Oh God, you are so good to me and you've given me so very much. Thank you God. You are my all in all." What was the Athenian response?

³² And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." ³³ So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴ However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. (Acts 17:32-33, NKJV).

Now look at the response of those who thought they knew it all. Some mocked Paul, and others said "we will hear you again on this matter." Guess what? They never heard Paul again on the matter. Those who rejected the gospel that day died and were eternally separated from the Lord Jesus. However, the text does tell us that some joined him and believed. One of them was "Dionysius the Areopagite." That means one of the main men up on the Areopagus accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, along with several others including a woman named Damaris.

These three towns show us three ways we can respond to the gospel and to God's direction in our lives. We can respond in anger like the Thessalonians. We can respond with arrogance, disbelief, and indecision like the Athenians. Or, we can respond like the Bereans who "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." The lesson today is to stay in the Word of God daily and keep an open mind to the things that God lays in your heart to think, say, and do. It is the only way to live!

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese of Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.