



Men's Bible Fellowship

ONE MAN. ONE MISSION. NO ONE LEFT BEHIND.

Colton, CA

ACTS

“MEN WHO TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN”

LESSON 16

I remember vividly the first time that I wiped out in large surf. The towering face of the wave pitched upward and the curl collapsed over me, plunging me deep beneath the surface. Being a neophyte in big-wave surfing, I panicked and struggled with all my might to get to the surface for a breath of air. My frantic effort ended when I hit my head on the seafloor. Without a point of reference I didn't know which way was up, or that all of my striving was in the wrong direction. In a similar fashion many people today, lacking a fixed reference point, struggle to reach the top, only to find they have gone in the wrong direction.

In our study, we will encounter a group of philosophers with a worldview that has no fixed absolutes or point of reference. Without God's absolute truth, men have no moral compass and any action can be justified through rationalization. Blaise Pascal once said, “Every man has a God-shaped vacuum in his heart which only God can fill.”¹ Quite literally, without God, virtually anything is permissible, and men try to fill the void in their life with everything imaginable. When they accused the Christians of turning the world upside down, they showed that without a reference point they didn't know which way was up. Paul and his companions were in fact turning the world right side up.

While a quick reading of chapter 17 makes Paul's defense seem merely an intellectual exercise, nothing could have been further from the truth. The charges against Paul before the Areopagus were serious. This is the council that sentenced Socrates to death in 399 BC for not honoring the gods of Athens and for corrupting the youth of the city. While Paul often used a sermon or monologue in presenting the gospel to others, he reasoned (the Greek word translates into *dialogue*) with the philosophers. Their reaction to Paul's presentation was predictable—some scoffed, some procrastinated, and some believed. The morality of Athens was remarkably similar to modern America, and their philosophical argument was merely a smokescreen to cover their immorality. Paul, likely reflecting on his visit with the philosophers at the Areopagus, later wrote to the Romans:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to

because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities —his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.” (Romans 1:18–22 NIV)

Modern western philosophy, which drives our contemporary worldview, is based upon the ideas of these ancient Greeks.² Without moral absolutes, the liberal philosophers of today, like their ancient predecessors, articulate seemingly logical arguments for the tolerance of sin. Unfortunately, these same arguments have convinced some within the church to reject God’s standards and adopt those of contemporary society. How can we prevent these philosophies from gaining a foothold in the church?

We need to look no further than this week’s memory verse. God’s Word is our fixed moral reference point against which all views should be measured. When friends relocate or travel, they ask me how they can most easily identify a solid church worth attending. An easy litmus test is to look for Bibles in the hands of those sitting in the pews. If a church encourages its members to bring a Bible to validate the sermon, it is unlikely to go far astray. While visiting my daughter in San Diego, she asked me to attend her church service. I was concerned when I noticed that most of the young congregation failed to bring a Bible to church. However, once the sermon started and the lights were lowered I was relieved to see the healthy glow of numerous electronic devices powering up to various Bible apps. Times and technology may change, but God’s Word doesn’t, and we need to use it as our standard against which all world views are measured if we wish to turn our world right side up.

¹http://thinkexist.com/quotation/there_is_a_god_shaped_vacuum_in_the_heart_of/166425.html

²<http://philorg.org/2013/02/socrates-the-father-of-western-philosophy/>

Memory Verse

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Acts 17:11 ESV

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

Day 1 – Ministry in Thessalonica – Acts 17:1–9

It is easy to gloss over the effort and suffering that went into Paul’s missionary journeys. In a single sentence they travel from Philippi to Amphipolis (33 miles), from Amphipolis to Apollonia (30 miles), and from Apollonia to Thessalonica (37 miles). An interesting note on archeology from Philippi comes from the mention of rulers or city officials (politarch) in verse 6. This title (politarch) is not found in any other Greek literature, and textual critics of the Bible cited this as evidence for its inaccuracy. Later, archeology uncovered a stone archway in Philippi with this title engraved (the stone now rests in British National Museum). Sixteen other monuments to politarchs have since been discovered.

1. Paul followed a similar pattern or custom (verse 2) for his ministry as earlier recorded in Salamis, Antioch, Iconium, etc. Describe Paul’s plan and how it played out in practice.

2. After a multitude of Gentiles come to faith, the non-believing Jews take offense and organize opposition to the missionaries.

a. What was the real motivation of the Jews?

b. What charges did the Jews bring against the missionaries?

3. On verse 6 John MacArthur writes, “There are people who live their whole life and the world doesn't even know they're alive. There are Christians who have absolutely no effect on anything. Here were two people of whom the world said, ‘They've turned us upside down.’”

a. What do you think the Jews meant by this statement?

b. What in the lives of these missionaries made this true?

c. How can we live a life that would make this statement true of us as well?

Memory Verse – Fill in the Blanks

“Now these Jews ____ more noble than ____ in Thessalonica; ____ received the word ____ all eagerness, examining ____ Scriptures daily to ____ if these things ____ so.” Acts 17:11 ESV

Day 2 – Ministry in Berea – Acts 17:10–15

Leaving Thessalonica, the missionaries traveled 60 miles west to Berea. The principal objection of Jews to Jesus as the Messiah was His suffering and crucifixion. Most Jews felt the Messiah would be an earthly king like David. However, a close examination of Old Testament prophecy revealed that in fact this was predicted in the writings of Isaiah. The men of Berea were willing to investigate Paul's premise using Scripture as their guide. For this Luke describes them as a noble race (eugenes).

1. The word picture for verse 11 in the Greek is vivid and gives insight into how we should approach our Bible studies. They were ready and willing (*prothumia*) to receive the word and searched (Greek term for examining evidence in a courtroom) the Scriptures for verification.

a. How should we approach our studies or church services based upon this passage?

b. What results do we see as the Bereans critically examined Paul’s teaching?

c. Where does opposition come from and what actions do the missionaries take because of it?

2. Some commentators feel Paul taught the Bereans from Isaiah 53 to correct any misconceptions of the identity of the Messiah. Share a couple of highlights from this passage that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

3. Paul presented the Bereans with evidence that demanded a verdict. Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel, and others have come to faith from carefully examining the claims of Christianity. If not because of factual evidence, why do most people reject Jesus according to His own words in John 3:18–21?

Memory Verse – Fill in the Blanks

“Now ____ Jews ____ more ____ than ____ in Thessalonica; ____ received ____ word ____ all _____, examining ____ Scriptures ____ to ____ if ____ things ____ so.” Acts 17:11 ESV

Day 3 - Philosophers in Athens – Acts 17:16–21

Paul then traveled to Athens after being expelled from Berea (the fifth city from which he has fled). Athens was at its zenith around 400 BC, but was still considered the intellectual center of the Roman Empire. A Roman satirist of the day, Petronius, remarked that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. He was correct as the population in Athens was around 40,000 but some historians estimate there were nearly 73,000 idols, images, and monuments to the Greek gods in the city.

1. Upon arriving in Athens, Paul didn’t wait for his back-up before taking action.

a. What was Paul's internal reaction to what he saw?

b. Despite his feelings, what actions did Paul take?

2. We find two polar opposite world views in the philosophy of the Stoics and Epicureans.

a. Using a dictionary or online source, **briefly** give the worldview of these two groups.

b. What was the attitude of the philosophers towards Paul and his message?

c. Historian Malcom Muggeridge once said, "All new news is old news happening to new people."

How are the arguments of today's skeptics and philosophers similar to Paul's detractors?

Memory Verse- Fill in the Blanks

"Now _____ more _____ than _____ in _____; _____ received _____ all _____, _____ Scriptures _____ to _____ things _____ so." Acts 17:11 ESV

Day 4 - Addressing the Areopagus Part 1 – Acts 17:22–34

The theater in which Paul would speak to the intellectual elite of Athens was called the Areopagus (from *Ares*, the Greek god of war, and *pagus*, meaning a hill or rocky outcropping). In Roman mythology, *Mars* was the equivalent of *Ares*, hence the location is frequently called Mars Hill. It was also the philosophical and judicial center of Athens.

1. Getting started on the right foot.

a. How did Paul address the crowd at the Areopagus?

b. The word *religious* (New King James Version) can also be translated *superstitious* (King James Version) depending on context. Which meaning do you think Paul intended and why?

2. Earlier Paul had been accused of bringing foreign or new gods into Athens. How does he masterfully answer this charge (verse 23)?

3. David, in the first four verses of Psalm 19, proclaims God should be evident to all men. What is the source or basis of this revelation?

Memory Verse– Fill in the Blanks

“Now _____ than _____; _____ received _____ all _____, _____ Scriptures _____ so.” Acts 17:11 ESV

Day 5 – Addressing the Areopagus Part – Acts 17:22–34

About 600 years earlier, a plague had broken out in Athens that threatened to wipe out the city. Not knowing which god was offended, the philosopher Epimenides proposed to turn a flock of sheep loose in the city. Wherever a sheep lay down, it would then be sacrificed on the closest altar. If no altar was nearby, one was quickly constructed to an unknown god and the sheep was sacrificed. The plague ran its course and the altars to the unknown gods remained.

1. Carefully read Paul’s presentation to the Areopagus (verses 23–32).

a. What bridge(s) does Paul build to connect with his audience?

b. Summarize Paul’s argument and evidence.

b. What point(s) of Paul’s message prove offensive to his listeners?

2. Commentators seem equally divided over whether or not Paul’s message was effective. What is your opinion? Explain why you chose either success or failure.

3. Looking back over the landscape of this chapter, is there any insight or observation that the Holy Spirit may have revealed to you which hasn't been addressed in our discussion? If so, please bless the members of your group by sharing it.

Take Away / Summary

To avoid walking in circles when lost in the wilderness, survival instructors teach their students to pick out the most prominent point in the distant landscape and walk toward it. In a similar sense we need to pick out the single most important truth in this week's study, and apply it in our life as we walk toward Jesus and out of the wilderness. Please share with your group what that truth is for you and how will you apply it this week:

Memory Verse – Fill in the Verse from Memory

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Acts 17:11 ESV

Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible. How would these phrases instruct or encourage us today?

Fair minded (Acts 17:11)

Religious (Acts 17:22)

Tool Box

Step 1: The Bible. Read the passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choose a more dynamic version such as New Living Translation or The Message. To focus in on the exact meaning of a verse, choose a more literal translation such as New American Standard Bible or New King James Version.

Step 2: Study Tools. Use these to help you dig deeper. Background Information: 1) Unger's Bible Dictionary 2) Bible Dictionaries online at biblestudytools.com and blueletterbible.com. Word Studies: 1) Zodhiates' The Complete Word Study New Testament 2) Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary 3) Strong's Dictionary of Bible Words.

Step 3: Commentaries. Commentaries should not be used in place of studying God's Word directly, but they can give you additional insights. Some good commentaries include: J. Vernon McGee, *The Expositor's Commentary*, NIV Application Commentary, H.A. Ironside, William Barclay (great for background and culture but be careful of his spiritual applications).

Step 4: Online Assistance. Should you have a specific question about the study please email your inquiry to: markn.valor@gmail.com

Timeline for the Life of Paul

Year	
35	<p>35 Martyrdom of Stephen—Acts 7:57</p> <p>35 Saul's Conversion—Acts 9:1</p>
	<p>35-38 Arabian Sojourn—Gal. 1:17 fits into Acts 9:23 ("many days")</p> <p>38 Visit to Jerusalem—Acts 9:26</p>
40	<p>38-43 Ministry in Syria and Cilicia—Acts 9:30 and Gal. 1:21</p> <p>43 Arrival in Antioch—Acts 11:25</p> <p>43/44 Famine Visit Acts 11:27</p>
	<p>45</p> <p>46-48 First Missionary Journey—Acts 13 and 14</p>
50	<p>49/50 Jerusalem conference—Acts 15 and Gal. 2:1</p> <p>50-52 Second Missionary Journey—Acts 15 through 18</p> <p>51/52 Before Gallio—Acts 18:12</p> <p>52 Return to Antioch—Acts 18:22</p>
	<p>53-57 Third Missionary Journey—Acts 18 through 21</p> <p>55</p> <p>53-55 In Ephesus—Acts 19</p>
	<p>57 Arrest in Jerusalem—Acts 21</p> <p>57-59 Imprisoned in Caesarea—Acts 23</p>
60	<p>59 Shipwrecked—Acts 23</p> <p>59-61/62 First Roman Imprisonment—Acts 28</p>
	<p>62-67 Fourth Missionary Journey—Titus 1:5</p>
65	<p>67/68 Second Roman Imprisonment—2 Tim. 4:6-8</p> <p>68 Trial and Execution</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>GALATIANS</u> 48/49 From Antioch</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS</u> 51/52 From Corinth</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>1 CORINTHIANS</u> 55 From Ephesus</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>2 CORINTHIANS</u> 55/56 From Macedonia</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>ROMANS</u> 57 From <u>Cenchera</u> or Corinth</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>EPHESIANS, COLOSSIANS, AND PHILEMON</u> 60 From Rome</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>PHILIPPIANS</u> 61 From Rome</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>1 TIMOTHY AND TITUS</u> 63-65 From Philippi</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>2 TIMOTHY</u> 68 From <u>Mamertine Dungeon</u> (2 Tim.4:6)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">⊕</p>
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OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

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- Jesus Ascension
 - Pentecost --- Baptism of Spirit 3,000 saved
 - Peter Heals Beggar 5,000 saved
 - Peter and John Before Sanhedrin
 - Ananias and Sapphira
 - Peter and John Before Sanhedrin Again
 - Seven Chosen for Ministry
 - Stephen's Speech and Martyrdom
 - Philip Ministry in Samaria
 - Saul's Conversion
 - Peter's Ministry Along Coast
 - 'Christian' Church in Antioch
 - Herod's Persecution of Church
 - Paul's First Missionary Journey
 - Jerusalem Conference
 - This Week → Paul's Second Missionary Journey
 - Paul's Third Missionary Journey
 - Paul's Arrest and Jerusalem Imprisonment
 - Paul's Trials in Caesarea
 - Paul's Voyage to Rome
 - Paul's Roman House Arrest



