***Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens***

**Summer 2022, Acts 17 August 7, 2022**

***“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here . . . .”*Acts 17:7**

**A tale of three cities**

*When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.*

Acts 17:1-5

*10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

Acts 17:16-40

16*While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there . . . .*

*32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

Acts 17:16-34

1. In these Greek cities, Paul starts in the synagogues, but the emphasis is on the Gentiles

2. In Greece, opposition to the gospel is both civil and religious

3. In three different cities, there are three different gospel presentations – and believers everywhere!

**The gospel in three different situations**

*2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said.*

Acts 17:2

1. This is a summary of Paul’s first gospel message in Psidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41)

2. For those familiar with Scripture, Paul shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of every promise in   
the Old Testament

*11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

Acts 17:11

1. When Paul encounters “noble character”, he allows Scripture to speak for itself

2. A seeker encountering the truth of the gospel of his or her own is a most powerful apologetic!

29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Acts 17:29-31

1. When the gospel of the cross and resurrection is rejected, Paul starts farther back in redemptive   
history

2. The Creator God is redemptive history challenged most assumptions of Greek/Roman philosophy

3. Only after Paul explains redemptive history does he introduce Jesus, the fulfillment of history

**Gospel ideas for Anacortes from Thessalonica, Berea and Athens**

Thessalonica: The simple gospel doesn’t answer all the important questions

9 *Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.*

*11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

*13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

1 Thessalonians 3

Berea: Reading Scripture is always a good thing

*9 The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever . . . .*

*10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;*

*they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.*

*11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Psalm 19

Athens: Our secular and post-modern culture requires even more worldview evangelism

*22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.*

*24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out 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 some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’*

*29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

Acts 17

**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon*'s* very good sermon on Acts 17 is at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0193.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0193.htm)

Tim Keller has said much on the topic of mission.  See “5 Practices” at [*https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/*](https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/)and [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/)

D. A. Carson has a wonderful essay from Acts 17 on “Worldview Evangelism” at [*https://www.monergism.com/athens-revisited-exegetical-study-acts-17-da-carson*](https://www.monergism.com/athens-revisited-exegetical-study-acts-17-da-carson)

J. C. Ryle has a wonderful “The City” essay at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/city.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/city.htm)

Deffinbaugh has an audio only message on Acts 17 at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)

For those who want to dig deeper into the worldview clash at Mars Hill, I recommend Andrew Klavan’s challenging “Speaking Truth into Modern Culture” at [*https://youtu.be/Cckiti7as44*](https://youtu.be/Cckiti7as44)

John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker’s commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Harry Boer, *That My House May Be Filled* (Eerdmans, 1957)

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# 5 Practices of a Missional Church

### Tim Keller at [*https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/*](https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/)

In the West, for nearly a thousand years, the relationship of European Christian churches to the broader culture was a relationship known as Christendom. The institutions of society “Christianized” people and stigmatized non-Christian belief and behavior.

British missionary, Lesslie Newbigin, went to India [in 1936]. When he returned to England, some thirty years later, he discovered that the Western church now found itself in a non-Christian society, but it had not adapted to its new situation. While most traditional evangelical churches can win the temperamentally conventional and conservative to Christ, American author Michael Wolff notes that this market is shrinking. If evangelical churches settle the decline in numbers, with the remaining Christian body not becoming missional, they will decline and die. This has instituted an even greater need for “missional” churches, which adopt the following practices:

**1. Speak in the vernacular**

In Christendom, technical biblical terms are well known inside and outside of the church. In a missional church, however, these terms must be explained.

The missional church:

* avoids “tribal” language, stylized prayer language, and evangelical jargon that seeks to set a spiritual tone.
* avoids “we-they” language, disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs
* avoids sentimental, pompous, “inspirational” talk
* avoids talking as if non-believers were not present

**2. Enter and retell the culture’s stories with the Gospel**

In Christendom, it is possible to simply exhort Christianized people to do what they know they should. There is little or no real engagement, listening, or persuasion. Often, along with exhortation, there is a heavy reliance on guilt to motivate behavior change.

In a missional church, preaching and communication always assume skeptics are present and consequently engages their stories. To enter the culture’s stories mean showing sympathy towards and deeply acquainting with literature, music, theatre, and other arts expressing the existing hopes, dreams, heroic narratives and fears. To retell the culture’s stories is to show how only in Christ can we have freedom without slavery and embrace-of-the-other without injustice.

**3. Theologically train laypeople for public life and vocation**

In a missional church, laypeople need theological education to “think Christianly” about everything and work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know three things: (a) which cultural practices manifest common grace and are to be embraced, (b) which practices are antithetical to the Gospel and must be rejected, and (c) which practices can be adapted/revised.

Christians will have to use the Gospel to demonstrate true, biblical love and tolerance in the public square towards those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which groups with opposing views show towards Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main “defeater” of the Gospel in the non-Christian West.

**4. Create Christian community that is countercultural and counterintuitive**

In Christendom, “fellowship” is basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support, and accountability.

In a missional church, however, Christian community must go beyond that to embody a counterculture, showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power.

* *In sex*. We avoid both the secular society’s idolization of sex and traditional society’s fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different from ours.
* *In money*. We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak.
* *In power*. We are committed to power sharing and relationship building among races and classes that are alienated outside of the body of Christ. A missional church must be deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice and deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion.

**5. Practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level**

It is very important that we do not spend time bashing and criticizing other kinds of churches. That criticism simply plays into the common “defeater” that Christians are all intolerant. While we align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate with, reach out to, and support the other congregations and churches in our area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.



# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

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## The World Turned Upside Down

May 9, 1858 by **C. H. SPURGEON** (1834-1892)  
at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0193.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0193.htm)

**"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." - Acts 17:6.**

This is just an old version of an oft-repeated story. When disturbances arise in a state, and rebellions and mutinies cause blood to be shed, it is still the custom to cry, "The Christians have done this." In the days of Jesus we know that it was laid to the charge of our blessed and divine Master, that he was a stirrer of sedition, whereas he himself had refused to be a king, when his followers would have taken him by force to make him one, for he said, "My kingdom is not of this world;" yet was he crucified under the two false charges of sedition and blasphemy. The same thing occurred with the Apostles. Wherever they went to preach the gospel, the Jews who opposed them sought to stir up the refuse of the city to put an end to their ministry; and then, when a great tumult had been made by the Jews themselves, who had taken unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring him out to the people, then the Jews laid the tumult and the uproar at the door of the Apostles, saying, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." This plan was followed all through the Roman empire, until Christianity became the state religion. There was never a calamity befel Rome, never a war arose, never a famine or a plague, but the vulgar multitude cried, "The Christians to the lions! The Christians have done this." Nero himself imputed the burning of Rome, of which he himself doubtless was the incendiary, to the Christians. The believers in Jesus were slandered as if they were the common sewer, into which all the filth of sin was to be poured; whereas, they were like Solomon's great brazen sea, which was full of the purest water, wherein even priests themselves might wash their robes. And you will remark that to this day the world still lays its ills at the door of the Christians. Was it not the foolish cry a few months ago, and are there not some weak-minded individuals who still believe it, that the great massacre and mutiny in India was caused by the missionaries. Forsooth; the men who turned the world upside down had gone there also; and because men broke through all the restraints of nature and of law, and committed deeds for which fiends might blush, this must be laid at the door of Christ's holy gospel, and the men of peace must bear on their shoulders the blame of war! Ah! we need not refute this: the calumny is too idle to need a refutation. Can it be true, that he whose gospel is love should be the fomenter of disturbance? Can it be fair for a moment to lay mutiny and rebellion at the door of the gospel, the very motto of which is, "Peace on earth, good will towards men?" Did not our Master say, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's?" Did he not himself pay tribute though he sent to the fish of the sea, to get the shekel? And have not his followers at all times been a peaceful generation? - save only and except where the liberty of their conscience was touched, and then they were not the men to bow their knees to tyrants and kings, but with brave old Oliver they did bind their kings in chains, and their nobles in fetters of iron, as they will do again, if their liberty ever should be infringed, so that they should not have power to worship God as they ought.  
  
We believe that what these Jews said of the Apostles, was just a downright willful lie. They knew better. The Apostles were not the disturbers of states. It is true, they preached that which would disturb the sinful constitution of a kingdom and which would disturb the evil practices of false priests, but they never meant to set men in an uproar. They did come to set men at arms with sin; they did draw the sword against iniquity; but against men as men, against kings as kings, they had no battle; it is with iniquity and sin, and wrong everywhere, that they proclaimed an everlasting warfare. But still, brethren, there is many a true word spoken in jest, we say, and surely there is many a true word spoken in malice. They said the Apostles turned the world upside down. They meant by that, that they were disturbers of the peace. But they said a great true thing; for Christ's gospel does turn the world upside down. It was the wrong way upwards before, and now that the gospel is preached, and when it shall prevail, it will just set the world right by turning it upside down.  
  
And now I shall try to show how, in the *world at large,* Christ's gospel turns the world upside down. and then I shall endeavor, as well as God shall help me, to show how the *little world that is within every man* is turned upside down, when he becomes a believer in the gospel of Christ.  
  
**I. First, then, the gospel of Christ turns the world upside down, WITH REGARD TO THE POSITION OF DIFFERENT CLASSES OF MEN.**  
In the esteem of men, the kingdom of heaven is something like this. High there on the summit, there sits the most grand rabbi, the right venerable, estimable and excellent doctor of divinity, the great philosopher, the highly learned, the deeply instructed, the immensely intellectual man. He sits on the apex: he is the highest, because he is the wisest. And just below him there is a class of men who are deeply studied - not quite so skilled as the former, but still exceeding wise, - who look down at those who stand at the basement of the pyramid, and who say to them, "Ah, they are the ignoble multitude, they know nothing at all." A little lower down, we come to the sober, respectable, thinking men, not those who set up for teachers, but those who seldom will be taught, because they already in their own opinion know all that is to be learned. Then after them there come a still larger number of very estimable folks, who are exceeding wise in worldly wisdom, although not quite so exalted as the philosopher and the rabbi. Lower still come those who have just a respectable amount of wisdom and knowledge, and then at the very basement there come the fool, and the little child, and the babe. When we look at these we say, "This is the wisdom of this world. Behold how great a difference there is between the babe at the bottom, and the learned doctor on the summit! How wide the distinction between the ignorant simpleton who forms the hard, rocky, stubborn basement, and the wise man of polished marble, who there stands resplendent at the apex of the pyramid." Now, just see how Christ turns the world upside down. There it stands. He just reverses it. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty men are chosen; but God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom." It is just turning the whole social fabric upside down; and the wise man finds now that he has to go upstairs towards his simplicity. He has been all his life trying as far as he could, to get away from the simplicity of the credulous child, he has been thinking, and judging, and weighing, and bringing his logic to cut up every truth he heard, and now he has to begin, and go up again: he has to become a little child, and turn back to his former simplicity. This is the world turned upside down, with a vengeance; and therefore the wise seldom love it.  
  
If you wish to see the world turned upside down to perfection, just turn to the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew: here you have a whole summary of the world reversed. Jesus Christ turned the world upside down the first sermon he preached. Look at the third verse. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Now, we like a man who has an ambitious spirit - a man who, as we say, knows how to push his way in the world - who looks up - is not contented with the position that he occupies, but is always for climbing higher and higher. And we have a very fair opinion too of a man, who has a very fair opinion of himself - a man who is not going to bow and cringe. He will have his rights, that he will, he will not give way to anybody. He believes himself to be somewhat, and he will stand on his own belief, and will prove it to the world yet. He is not one of your poor, mean-spirited fellows, who are content with poverty, and sit still. *He* will not be contented. Now such a man as this the world admires. But Christ just turns that upside down, and says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." The men who have no strength of their own, but look for all to Christ - the men who have no spirit to run with a wicked world, but who would rather suffer an injury than resent one - the men who are lowly and of a humble carriage, who seek not to lift their heads above their fellows; who if they be great have greatness thrust upon them, but never seek it - who are content along the cool, sequestered vale of life, to keep the even tenour of their way - who seem to have always ringing in their ears, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not" - "the poor in spirit," happy in their poverty, who are content with the Lord's providence, and think themselves far more rich than they deserve to be. Now, these men Christ says, are blessed. The world says, they are soft, they are fools; but Christ puts those on the top whom the world puts at the bottom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for their's is the kingdom of heaven."  
  
Then there is another lot of people in the world; they are always *mourning.* They do not let you see it often, for their Master has told them when they fast, to anoint their face, that they appear not unto men to fast, but still secretly before God they have to groan; they hang their harps upon the willows; they mourn for their own sin, and then they mourn for the sin of the times. The world says of these, "They are a moping, melancholy set; I would not care to belong to their number;" and the gay reveller comes in, and he almost spits upon them in his scorn. For what are they? They love the darkness. They are the willows of the stream, but this man, like the proud poplar, lifts his head, and is swayed to and fro in the wind of his joy, boasting of his greatness, and his freedom. Hear how the gay youth talks to his mourning friend, who is under conviction of sin. "Ah! yours is a morbid disposition; I pity you; you ought to be under the hand of a physician. You go mourning through this world. What a miserable thing, to be plunging through waves of tribulation! What a dismal case is yours! I would not stand in your shoes and be in your position for all the world." No, but Christ turns the world upside down; and so those people whom you think to be mournful and sorrowful, are the very ones who are to rejoice. For read the fourth verse, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Yes, worldling, your joy is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. It blazeth a little, and maketh a great noise: it is soon done with. But "light is *sown* for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." You cannot see the light now, because it is sown. It lies under the clods of poverty, and shame, and persecution, mayhap. But when the great harvest day shall come, the blades of light, upstarting at the second coming, shall bring forth "the full corn in the ear" of bliss and glory everlasting. O ye mourning souls, be glad; for whereas the world puts you beneath it, Christ puts you above the world's head. When he turns the world upside down, he says you *shall* be comforted.  
  
Then there is another race of people, called *"the meek."* You may have met with them now and then. Let me describe the opposite. I know a man who never feels happy unless he has a law-suit; he would never pay a bill unless be had a writ about it. He is fond of law. The idea of pulling another up before the court is a great delicacy to him. A slight affront he would not easily forget. He has a very large amount of meek dignity; and if he be never so slightly touched, if a harsh word be spoken against him, or one slander uttered he is down upon his enemy at once; for he is a man of a hard temper, and he casts the debtor into prison, and verily I say unto thee, if thou gettest in there by his writ, thou shalt never come out until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Now the meek are of a very different disposition. You may revile them, but they will not revile again; you may injure them, but they know that their Master has said, "I say unto thee, resist not evil." They do not put themselves into airs and passions on a slight affront, for they know that all men are imperfect, and therefore they think that perhaps their brother made a mistake, and did not wish to hurt their feelings, and therefore they say, "Well, if he did not wish to do it, then I will not be hurt by it, I dare say he meant well, and therefore I will take the will for the deed, and though he spoke harshly, yet he will be sorry for it to morrow; I will not mention it to him, - I will put up with whatever he chooses to say." There is a slander uttered against him: he says, "Well, let it alone; it will die of itself; where no wood is, the fire goeth out." Another speaketh exceeding ill against him in his hearing; but he justs holds his tongue; he is dumb and openeth not his mouth. He is not like the sons of Zeruiah, who said to David, "Let us go and take off that dead dog's head, because he cursed the king" He says, "No, if the Lord hath bidden him curse; let him curse." "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." He is quite content to bear and forbear, and put up with a thousand injuries, rather than inflict one; meekly and quietly he goes his way through the world, and people say, "Ah! such a man as that will never get on; he will always be taken in. Why, he will be lending money, and will never get it back again; he will be giving his substance to the poor, and he will never receive it. How stupid he is! He allows people to infringe on his rights; he has no strength of mind; he does not know how to stand up for himself, fool that he is." Ay, but Christ turns it upside down, and he says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Is not that provoking to you graspers, you high spirited people, you lawyers, you that are always trying to bring your neighbor into trouble touching your rights? you do it in order that you may inherit the earth: see how Christ spites you, and treads your wisdom under feet. He says, *"The meek shall inherit the earth."* After all, very often, the best way to get our rights is to let them alone. I am quite certain that the safest way to defend your character is never to say a word about it. If every person in this place chooses to slander me and utter the most furious libels that he pleases, he may rest quite assured he will never have a law-suit from me. I am not quite fool enough for that. I have always noticed that when a man defends himself in a court of law against any slander, he just does his enemy's business with his own hand. Our enemies cannot hurt us, unless we hurt ourselves. No man's character was ever really injured except by himself. Be you among the meek, and you shall inherit the earth. Bear all things, hope all things, believe all things, and it shall be the best, even on this earth, in the end.  
  
Do you see that very respectable gentleman yonder, who has never omitted to attend his church or his chapel twice every Sunday ever since he became a man. He reads his Bible too, and he has family prayers. It is true that there are certain stories flying about, that he is rather hard upon his laborers, and exacting at times in his payments, but does justice to all men, although no further will he go. This man is on very good terms with himself; when he gets up in the morning he always shakes hands with himself, and compliments himself on being a very excellent person. He generally lives in a front street, in his opinion, and the first number in the street, too. If you speak to him about his state before God, he says, that if *he* does not go to heaven nobody will; for he pays twenty shillings in the pound to everybody; he is strictly upright, and there is no one who can find any fault with his character. Isn't he a good man? Don't you envy him? - a man who has so excellent an opinion of himself that he thinks himself perfect; or if he is not quite perfect, yet he is so good that he believes that with a little help, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Well, now, do you see standing at the back of the church there, a poor woman with tears running down her eyes? Come forward, ma'am; let us hear your history. She is afraid to come forward; she dares not speak in the presence of respectable persons; but we gather thus much from her: She has lately found out that she is full of sin, and she desires to know what she must do to be saved. Ask her. She tells you she has no merits of her own. Her song is, "I the chief of sinners am. Oh! that mercy would save me!" She never compliments herself upon her good works, for she says she has none; all her righteousnesses are as filthy rags; she puts her mouth in the very dust when she prays, and she dares not lift so much as her eyes towards heaven. You pity that poor woman. You would not like to be in her case. The other man whom I have just mentioned, stands at the very top of the ladder, does he not? But this poor woman stands at the bottom. Now just see the gospel process - the world turned upside down. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled;" while the man who is content with himself has this for his portion - "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse;" publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before you, because you seek not the righteousness which is of faith, but you seek it as it were by the works of the law. So here you see again is the world turned upside down in the first sermon Christ ever preached.  
  
Now turn to the next beatitude - in the seventh verse - "Blessed are the *merciful:* for they shall obtain mercy." Of this I have already spoken. The merciful are not much respected in this world - at least if they are imprudently merciful, the man who forgives too much, or who is too generous, is not considered to be wise. But Christ declares that he who has been merciful - merciful to supply the wants of the poor, merciful to forgive his enemies and to pass by offenses, shall obtain mercy. Here, again, is the world turned upside down.  
  
"Blessed are the *pure in heart:* for they shall see God." The world says, "Blessed is the man who indulges in a gay life." If you ask the common run of mankind who is the happy man, they will tell you, "The happy man is he who has abundance of money, and spends it freely, and is freed from restraint - who leads a merry dance of life, who drinks deep of the cup of intoxication - who revels riotously - who, like the wild horse of the prairie, is not bitted by order, or restrained by reason, but who dashes across the broad plains of sin, unharnessed, unguided, unrestrained." This is the man whom the world calls happy: the proud man, the mighty man, the Nimrod; the man who can do just as he wishes, and who spurns to keep the narrow way of holiness. Now, the Scripture says, Not so; "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"Blest is the man who shuns the place  
Where sinners love to meet;  
Who fears to tread their wicked ways,  
And hates the scoffer's seat," -

the man who cannot touch one thing because that would be lascivious, nor another because that would spoil his communion with his Master; a man who cannot frequent this place of amusement, because he could not pray there, and cannot go to another, because he could not hope to have his Master's sanction upon an hour so spent. That man, pure in heart, is said to be a Puritanical moralist, a strict Sabbatarian, a man who has not any mind of his own; but Jesus Christ puts all straight, for he says, these are the blessed men these are the happy ones. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."  
  
And now look at the ninth verse. What a turning of the world upside down that is! You walk through London, and who are the men that we put upon our columns and pillars, and upon our park gates, and so on? Read the ninth verse, and see how that turns the world upside down. There upon the very top of the world, high, high up, can be seen the armless sleeve of a Nelson: there he stands, high exalted above his fellows; and there, in another place, with a long file up his back, stands a duke; and in another place, riding upon a war horse, is a mighty man of war. These are the world's blest heroes. Go into the capital of what empire you choose to select, and you shall see that the blessed men, who are put upon pedestals, and who have statues erected to their memory, who are put into our St. Paul's Cathedral, and our Westminster Abbey, are not exactly the men mentioned in the ninth verse. Let us read it. "Blessed are the *peace-makers;* for they shall be called the children of God." Ah! but you do not often bless the peace-makers, do you? The man who comes between two beligerents, and bears the stroke himself - the man who will lie down on the earth, and plead with others that they would cease from warfare - these are the blessed. How rarely are they set on high. They are generally set aside, as people who cannot be blessed, even though it seem that they try to make others so. Here is the world turned upside down. The warrior with his garment stained in blood, is put into the ignoble earth, to die and rot; but the peace-maker is lifted up, and God's crown of blessing is put round about his head, and men one day shall see it, and struck with admiration they shall lament their own fully, that they exalted the blood-red sword of the warrior, but that they did rend the modest mantle of the noon who did make peace among mankind.  
  
And to conclude our Saviour's sermon, notice once more, that we find in this world a race of persons who have always been hated - a class of men who have been hunted like the wild goat; persecuted, afflicted, and tormented. As an old divine says, "The Christian has been looked upon as if he had a wolfs head, for as the wolf was hunted for his head everywhere, so has the Christian been hunted to the uttermost ends of the earth." And in reading history we are apt to say, "These persecuted persons occupy the lowest room of blessedness; these who have been sawn asunder, who have been burned, who have seen their houses destroyed, and have been driven as houseless exiles into every part of the earth - these men who have wandered about in sheep's skins, and goat's skins, - these are the very least of mankind." Not so. The gospel reverses all this, and it says, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for *righteousness'* sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." I repeat it: The whole of these beatitudes are just in conflict with the world's opinion. and we may quote the words of the Jew, and say, "Jesus Christ was 'the man who turned the world upside down.' "  
  
And now I find I must be very brief for I have taken so much time in endeavoring to show how Christ's gospel turned the world upside down, in the position of its characters, that I shall have no space left for anything else. But will you have patience with me, and I will briefly pass through the other points?  
  
I have next to remark, that the Christian religion turns the world upside down *in its maxims.* I will just quote a few texts which show this very clearly. "It was said by them of old time, eye for eye and tooth for tooth; but I say unto you, resist not evil" It has generally been held by each of us, that we are not to allow anyone to infringe upon our rights; but the Saviour says, "Whosoever would sue thee at the law and take thy cloak, let him take thy coat also." "If any man smite thee on the one cheek, turn unto him the other also." If these precepts were kept, would it not turn the world upside down? "It has been said by them of old time, love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy;" but Jesus Christ said, "Let love be unto all men." He commands us to love our enemies, and to pray for them who despitefully use us. He says, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, and if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." This would indeed be turning the world upside down; for what would become of our war ships and our warriors, if at the port-holes where now we put our cannons, we should have sent out to some burning city of our enemies - for instance, to burning Sebastapol, - if we had sent to the houseless inhabitants, who had been driven from their homes, barrels of beef, and bundles of bread and clothes, to supply their wants. That would have been a reversal of all human policy, but yet it would have been just the carrying out of Christ's law, after all. So shall it be in the days that are to come, our enemies shall be loved, and our foemen shall be fed. We are told too, in these times, that it is good to a man to heap unto himself abundant wealth, and make himself rich, but Jesus Christ turned the world upside down, for he said, there was a certain rich man who was clothed in scarlet, and fared sumptuously every day, and so on, and his fields brought forth abundantly; and he said, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater;" but the Lord says, "Thou fool!" That is reversing everything in this world. You would have made an Alderman of him, or a Lord Mayor; and fathers would have patted their boys on the head, and said, "That is all through his frugality and taking care; see how he has got on in the world; when he had got a good crop, he did not give it away to the poor, as that extravagant man does who has kept on working all his life, and never be able to retire from business; he saved it all up; - be as good a boy as So-and-so, and get on too." But Christ said "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." A turning of everything upside down. And others of us will have it, that we ought to be very careful every day, and always looking forward to the future, and always fretting about what is to be. Here is a turning of the world upside down, when Jesus Christ says, "Remember the ravens; they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them, are ye not better than they?" I do believe that at this day the maxims of business are clean opposed to the maxims of Christ. But I shall be answered by this, "Business is business." Yes, I know business is business, but business has no business to be such business as it is. Oh! that it might be altered, till every man could make his business his religion, and make a religion of his business  
  
I have not detained you long upon that point; and therefore I am free to mention a third. How Christ has turned the world upside down, as to our *religious notions.* Why, the mass of mankind believe, that if any man wills to be saved, that is all which is necessary. Many of our preachers do in effect preach this worldly maxim. They tell men that they must make themselves willing. Now, just hear how the gospel upsets that. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." The world will have an universal religion too; but how Christ overturns that. "I pray for them; I pray not for the world." He hath ordained us *from among men.* "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." "The Lord knoweth them that are his." How that runs counter to all the world's opinion of religion! The world's religion is this - "Do, and thou shalt live." Christ's religion is - "Believe and live." We will have it, that if a man be righteous, sober upright, he shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but Christ says - This thou oughtest to have done; but still, not this can ever cleanse thee. "As many as are under the works of the law are under the curse." "By the works or the law shall no flesh living be justified." " Believe and live," is just the upsetting of every human notion. Cast thyself on Christ: trust in him. Have good works afterwards; but first of all trust in him that died upon the tree. This is the overturning of every opinion of man. And hence mortals will always fight against it, so long as the human heart is what it is. Oh! that we knew the gospel! Oh! that we felt the gospel! For it would be the upsetting of all self-righteousness, and the casting down of every high look, and of every proud thing.  
 **II. And now, beloved, spare me a little time, while I try to show THAT WHICH IS TRUE IN THE WORLD, IS TRUE IN THE HEART.**

Instead, however, of enlarging at full length upon the different topics, I shall make my last point the subject of examination.  
  
Man is a little world, and what God does in the outer world, he does in the inner. If any of you would be saved your hearts must be turned upside down. I will now appeal to you, and ask you whether you have ever felt this - whether you know the meaning of it?  
  
**In the first place, your *judgment* must be turned upside down.**

Cannot many of you say, that which you now believe to be the truth of God is very far opposed to your former carnal notions? Why, if anyone had told you, that you should be a believer in the distinguishing doctrines of free and sovereign grace, you would have laughed him in the face. "What! I believe the doctrine of election? What! I ever hold the doctrine of particular redemption, or final perseverance? Pshaw! nonsense! It cannot be!" But now you do hold it, and the thing which you thought unreasonable and unjust, now seems to you to be for God's glory, and for man's eternal benefit. You can kiss the doctrine which once you despised, and you meekly receive it as sweeter than the droppings of honey from the honeycomb, though once you thought it to be as the very poison of asps, and gall, and wormwood. Yes, when grace enters the heart, there is a turning upside down of all our opinions; and the great truth of Jesus sits reigning on our soul.  
  
**Is there not, again, a total change of all your *hopes?***

Why, your hopes used to be all for this world. If you could but get rich, if you could but be great and honored, you would be happy! You looked forward to it. All you were expecting was a paradise this side the flood. And now where are your hopes? - not on earth; for where your treasure is, there must your heart be also. You are looking for a city that hands have not piled; your desires are heavenly, whereas they were gross and carnal once. Can ye say that? Oh! all ye members of this congregation, can ye say that your hopes and your desires are changed? Are ye looking upward, instead of downward? Are you looking to serve God on earth, and to enjoy him for ever? Or are you still content with thinking "What ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed?"  
  
**Again, it is a complete upsetting of all your *pleasures.***

You loved the tavern once, you hate it now. You hated God's house once; it is now your much-loved habitation. The song, the Sunday newspaper, the lewd novel - all these were sweet to your taste; but you have burned the books that once enchanted you, and now the dusty Bible from the back of the shelf is taken down, and there it lies wide open upon the family table, and it is read both morn and night, much loved, much prized and delighted in. The Sabbath was once the dullest day of the week to you. you either loitered outside the door in your shirt-sleeves, if you were poor, or if you were rich you spent the day in your drawing-room, and had company in the evening: now, instead thereof, your company you find in the church of the living God, and you make the Lord's house the drawing-room where you entertain your friends. Your feast is no longer a banquet of wine, but a banquet of communion with Christ. There are some of you who once loved nothing better than the theater, the low concert room, or the casino: over such places you now see a great black mark of the curse, and you never go there. You seek now the prayer meeting, the church meeting, the gathering of the righteous, the habitation of the Lord God of hosts.  
  
**It is marvellous how great a change the gospel makes in a man's *house* too.**

Why, it turns his house upside down. Look over the mantle-piece - There is a vile daub of a picture there, or a wretched print, and the subject is worse than the style of the thing. But when the man follows Jesus he takes that down, and he gets a print of John Bunyan in his prison, or his wife standing before the magistrate, or a print of the apostle Paul preaching at Athens, or some good old subject representing something Biblical. There is a pack of cards and a cribbage board in the cupboard; he turns them out, and instead he puts there perhaps the monthly magazine, or mayhaps few works of old divines, just here and there one of the publications of the Religious Tract Society, or a volume of a Commentary. Every thing is upside down there. The children say, "Father is so altered." They never knew such a thing. He used to come home sometimes drunk of a night, and the children used to run up stairs and be in bed before he came in; and now little John and little Sarah sit at the window and watch till he comes home; and they go toddling down the street to meet him, and he takes one in his arms, and the other by the hand, and brings them home with him. He used to teach them to sing "Begone dull care" or something worse, now he tells them of "Gentle Jesus meek and mild" or puts into their mouth some sweet song of old. A jolly set of companions he used to have come to see him, and a roaring party there used to be of them, on a Sunday afternoon; but that is all done with. The mother smiles upon her husband: she is a happy woman now; she knows that he will no longer disgrace himself by plunging into the vilest of society, and being seduced into the worst of sins. Now, if you could take a man's heart out, and put a new heart right into him, it would not be half so good, if it were another natural heart, as the change that God works, when he takes out the heart of stone, and puts in a heart of flesh -

"A heart resigned, submissive, meek,  
Our dear Redeemer's throne  
Where only Christ is heard to speak,  
Where Jesus reigns alone."

I put, then, the question to you again: Have you been turned upside down? How about your companions? You loved those the best who could swear the loudest, talk the fastest, and tell the greatest falsehoods: now you love those who can pray the most earnestly, and tell you the most of Jesus. Everything is changed with you. If you were to meet your old self going down the street, you would not know him, except by hearsay; you are no relation to him at all. Sometimes the old gentleman comes to your house, and he begins to tempt you to go back; but you turn him out of doors as soon as you can, and say, "Begone! I never got on so long as I knew you; I had a ragged coat to my back then, and I was always giving the publican all my money; I never went to God's house, but cursed my Maker, and added sin to sin, and tied a mill-stone round my neck. So away from me, I will have nothing to do with you; I have been buried with Christ, and I have risen with him. I am a new man in Christ Jesus, old things have passed away, and behold all things have become new."  
  
I have some here, however, who belong to a different class of society, who could not indulge in any of these things; but ah! ladies and gentlemen, if you are ever converted, you must have as great a sweeping out as the poorest man that ever lived. There must be as true a turning upside down in the salvation of an earl, or a duke, or a lord, as in the salvation of a pauper or a peasant. There is as much sin in the higher ranks as in the lower, and sometimes more, because they have more light, more knowledge, more influence, and when they sin, they not only damn themselves, but others too. O you that are rich, have you had a change too? Have the frivolities of this world become sickening things to you? Do you turn away with loathing from the common cant and conventionalism of high life? Have you forsaken it? and can you now say, "Although I am in the world, yet am I not of it; its pomps and vanities I do eschew; its pride and its glory I trample under feet; these are nothing to me; I would follow my Master bearing his cross, through evil report and through good report?" If such be not the case, if you are not changed, remember, there are no exceptions; one truth is true for all - "Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of heaven." And that amounts in substance to my test: except ye be thoroughly renewed, turned upside down, ye cannot be saved. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" for he that believeth shall be sanctified and renewed - shall he saved at last - but he that believeth not must be cast away in the great day of God's account.  
  
The Lord bless you; for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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ACTS XVII. 16, 17.

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

“Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.”

Perhaps you live in a town, or city, and see more of bricks and mortar than of green fields. Perhaps you have some relative or friend living in a town, about whom you naturally feel a deep interest. In either case, the verses of Scripture which head this page demand your best attention. Give me that attention for a few short minutes while I try to show you the lessons, which the passage contains.

You see face to face in the verses before you no common city and no common man.

The city is the famous city Athens-Athens, renowned to this very day for its statesmen, philosophers, historians, poets, painters, and architects,-Athens, the eye of ancient Greece, as ancient Greece was the eye of the heathen world.

The man is the great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul-St. Paul, the most laborious and successful Minister and Missionary the world has ever seen-St. Paul, who by pen and tongue has left a deeper mark on mankind than any born of woman, except his Divine Master.

Athens and St. Paul-the great servant of Christ, and the great stronghold of old heathenism,-are brought before us face to face. The result is told us: the interview is carefully described. The subject, I venture to think, is eminently suited to the times in which we live, and to the circumstances of many a dweller in London, Liverpool, Manchester, and other great English towns in the present day.

Without further preface I ask you to observe three things in this passage:-

I. What St. Paul SAW at Athens.

II. What St. Paul FELT at Athens.

III. What St. Paul DID at Athens.

I. First, then, *What did St. Paul* SEE at *Athens?*

The answer of the text is clear and unmistakable. He saw a “city wholly given to idolatry.” Idols met his eyes in every street. The temples of idol gods and goddesses occupied every prominent position. The magnificent statue of Minerva, twenty-six cubits high, according to Pliny, towered above the Acropolis, and caught the eye from every point. A vast system of idol-worship overspread the whole place, and thrust itself everywhere on his notice. The ancient writer, Pausanias, expressly says, that “the Athenians surpassed all states in the attention which they paid to the worship of the gods.” In short, the city, as the marginal reading says, was “full of idols.”

And yet this city, I would have you remember, was probably the most favourable specimen of a heathen city which St. Paul could have seen. In proportion to its size it very likely contained the most learned, civilized, philosophical, highly educated, artistic, intellectual population on the face of the globe. But what was it in a religious point of view? The city of wise men like Socrates and Plato-the city of Solon, and Pericles, and Demosthenes,-the city of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Thucydides,-the city of mind, and intellect, and art, and taste,-this city was “wholly given to idolatry.” If the true God was unknown at Athens, what must He have been in the darker places of the earth? If the eye of Greece was so spiritually dim, what must have been the condition of such places as Babylon, Ephesus, Tyre, Alexandria, Corinth, and even of Rome? If men were so far gone from the light in a green tree, what must they have been in the dry?

Reader, what shall we say to these things? What are the conclusions to which they irresistibly draw us?

Ought you not to learn, for one thing, the *absolute need of a Divine revelation,* and of teaching from heaven? Leave man without a Bible, and he will have a religion of some kind, for human nature, corrupt as it is, must have a God. But it will be a religion without light, or peace, or hope. “The world by wisdom knew not God.” (1 Cor. i. 2l.) Old Athens is a standing lesson which we shall do well to observe. It is vain to suppose that nature, unaided by revelation, will ever lead fallen man to nature’s God. Without a Bible, the Athenian bowed down to stocks and stones, and worshipped the work of his own hands. Place a heathen philosopher,-a Stoic or an Epicurean,-by the side of an open grave, and ask him about a world to come, and he could have told you nothing certain, satisfactory, or peace-giving.

Ought you not to learn, for another thing, that the *highest intellectual training is no security against utter darkness in religion?* We cannot doubt that mind and reason were highly educated at Athens, if anywhere in the heathen world. The students of Greek philosophy were not unlearned and ignorant men. They were well-versed in logic, ethics, rhetoric, history, and poetry. But all this mental discipline did not prevent their city being a “city wholly given to idolatry.” And are we to be told in the nineteenth century, that reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, history, languages, and physical science, without a knowledge of the Scriptures, are sufficient to constitute *education?* God forbid! We have not so learned Christ. It may please some men to idolize intellectual power, and to speak highly of the debt which the world owes to the Greek mind. One thing, at any rate, is abundantly clear. Without the knowledge which the Holy Ghost revealed to the Hebrew nation, old Greece would have left the world buried in dark idolatry. A follower of Socrates or Plato might have talked well and eloquently on many subjects, but he could have never answered the jailer’s question, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts xvi. 30.) He could never have said in his last hour, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Ought you not to learn, for another thing, that the *highest excellence in the material arts is no preservative against the grossest superstition?* The perfection of Athenian architecture and sculpture is a great and undeniable fact. The eyes of St. Paul at Athens beheld many a “thing of beauty” which is still “a joy for ever” to artistic minds. And yet the men who conceived and executed the splendid buildings of Athens were utterly ignorant of the one true God. The world now-a-days is well-nigh drunk with self-conceit about our so-called progress in arts and sciences. Men talk and write of machinery and manufactures, as if nothing were impossible. But let it never be forgotten that the highest art or mechanical skill is consistent with a state of spiritual death in religion. Athens, the city of Phidias, was a “city wholly given to idolatry.” An Athenian sculptor might have designed a matchless tomb, but he could not have wiped a single tear from a mourner’s eye.

These things ought not to be forgotten. They ought to be carefully pondered. They suit the times in which we live. We have fallen on a sceptical and an unbelieving age. We meet on every side with doubts and questionings about the truth and value of revelation. “Is not reason alone sufficient?”-“Is the Bible really needful to make men wise unto salvation?”-“Has not man a light within, a verifying power, able to guide him to truth and God?”-Such are the inquiries which fall thick as hail around us. Such are the speculations which disquiet many unstable minds.

One plain answer is an appeal to facts. The remains of heathen Egypt, Greece, and Rome shall speak for us. They are preserved by God’s providence to this very day as monuments of what intellect and reason can do without revelation. The minds which designed the temples of Luxor and Carnac, or the Parthenon, or Coliseum were not the minds of fools. The builders who executed their designs did better and more lasting work than any contractor can do in modern times. The men who conceived the sculptured friezes, which we know as the Elgin Marbles, were trained and intellectual to the highest degree. And yet in religion these men were darkness itself. (Eph. v. 8.) The sight which St. Paul saw at Athens is an unanswerable proof that man knows nothing which can do his soul good without a Divine revelation.

II. I ask you to notice, in the second place, *what St. Paul* FELT *at Athens.* He saw a “city wholly given to idolatry.” How did the sight affect him? What did he feel?

It is instructive to observe how the same sight affects different people. Place two men on the same spot; let them stand side by side; let the same objects be presented to their eyes. The emotions called forth in the one man will often be wholly different from those called forth in the other. The thoughts which will be wakened up and brought to birth will often be as far as the poles asunder.

A mere artist visiting Athens for the first time would doubtless have been absorbed in the beauty of its buildings. A statesman or orator would have called up the memory of Pericles or Demosthenes. A literary man would have thought of Thucydides and Sophocles and Plato. A merchant would have gazed on the Piræus, its harbour, and the sea. But an apostle of Christ had far higher thoughts. One thing, above all others, swallowed up his attention, and made all else look small. That one thing was the spiritual condition of the Athenian people, the state of their souls. The great Apostle of the Gentiles was eminently a man of one thing, Like his Divine Master, he was always thinking of his “Father’s business.” (Luke ii. 49.) He stood at Athens, and thought of nothing so much as Athenian souls. Like Moses, Phineas, and Elijah, “his spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

Of all sights on earth, I know none so impressive, none so calculated to arouse thought in a reflecting mind, as the sight of a great city. The daily intercourse of man with man, which a city naturally produces, seems to sharpen intellect, and stimulate mental activity to an extent which dwellers in rural parishes, or other solitary places, cannot realize. Rightly or wrongly, the inhabitant of a city thinks twice as much, and twice as quickly, as the inhabitant of a village. It is the city “where Satan’s seat is.” (Rev. ii. 13.) It is the city where evil of every kind is most rapidly conceived, sown, ripened, and brought to maturity.-It is the city where the young man leaving home, and launching into life, becomes soonest hardened, and conscience-seared by daily familiarity with the sight of sin.-It is the city where sensuality, intemperance, and worldly amusements of the vilest kind, flourish most rankly, and find a congenial atmosphere.-It is the city where ungodliness and irreligion meet with the greatest encouragement, and the unhappy Sabbath breaker, or neglecter of all means of grace, can fortify himself behind the example of others, and enjoy the miserable comfort of feeling that “he does not stand alone!”-It is the city which is the chosen home of every form of superstition, ceremonialism, enthusiasm, and fanaticism in religion-It is the city which is the hot-bed of every kind of false philosophy, of Stoicism, Epicureanism, Agnosticism, Secularism, Scepticism, Positivism, Infidelity, and Atheism.-It is the city where that greatest of modern inventions, the printing-press, that mighty power for good or evil, is ever working with unsleeping activity, and pouring forth new matter for thought.-It is the city where the daily newspapers are continually supplying food for minds, and moulding and guiding public opinion.-It is the city which is the centre of all national business: the banks, the law-courts, the Stock-exchange, the Parliament or Assembly, are all bound up with the city.-It is the city which, by magnetic influence, draws together the rank and fashion of the land, and gives the tone to the tastes and ways of society.-It is the city which practically controls the destiny of a nation. Scattered millions, in rural districts, without habitual concert or contact, are powerless before the thousands who dwell side by side and exchange thought every day. It is the towns which govern a land.-I pity the man who could stand on the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and look down on London without some emotion, and not reflect that he sees the heart whose pulsations are felt over the whole civilized globe. And shall I wonder for a moment that the sight of Athens “stirred the spirit” of such a man as the great Apostle of the Gentiles? I cannot wonder at all. It was just the sight which was likely to move the heart of the converted man of Tarsus, the man who wrote the Epistle to the Romans, and had seen Jesus Christ face to face.

He was stirred with holy *compassion.* It moved his heart to see so many myriads perishing for lack of knowledge, without God, without Christ, having no hope, travelling in the broad road which leadeth to destruction.

He was stirred with holy *sorrow.* It moved his heart to see so much talent misapplied. Here were hands capable of excellent works, and minds capable of noble conceptions. And yet the God who gave life and breath and power was not glorified.

He was stirred with holy *indignation* against sin and the devil. He saw the god of this world blinding the eyes of multitudes of his fellow-men, and leading them captive at his will. He saw the natural corruption of man infecting the population of a vast city like one common disease, and an utter absence of any spiritual medicine, antidote, or remedy.

He was stirred with holy *zeal* for his Master’s glory. He saw the “strong man armed” keeping a house which was not lawfully his, and shutting out the rightful possessor. He saw his Divine Master unknown and unrecognised by His own creatures, and idols receiving the homage due to the King of kings.

Reader, these feelings which stirred the Apostle are a leading characteristic of a man born of the Spirit. Do you know anything of them? Where there is true grace there will always be tender concern for the souls of others. Where there is true sonship to God there will always be zeal for the Father’s glory. It is written of the ungodly, that they not only commit things worthy of death, but also “have pleasure in them that do them.” (Romans i. 32.) It may be said with equal truth of the godly, that they not only mourn over sin in their own hearts, but mourn over sin in others.

Hear what is written of Lot in Sodom: “He vexed his soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.” (2 Peter ii. 8.) Hear what is written of David: “Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law.” (Psalm cxix. 136.) Hear what is written of the godly in Ezekiel’s time: “They sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of the land.” (Ezek. ix. 4.) Hear what is written of our Lord and Saviour Himself: “He beheld the city and wept over it.” (Luke xix. 41.) Surely it may be laid down as one of the first principles of Scriptural religion, that he who can behold sin without sorrowful feelings has not the mind of the Spirit. This is one of those things in which the children of God are manifest, and are distinguished from the children of the devil.

I call your special attention to this point. The times demand that we look it fully in the face. The feelings with which we regard sin, heathenism, and irreligion are a subject of vast importance in the present day.

I ask you, first, to look outside our own country, and consider the state of the heathen world. At least six hundred millions of immortal beings are at this moment sunk in ignorance, superstition, and idolatry. They live and die without God, without Christ, and without hope. In sickness and sorrow they have no comfort. In old age and death they have no life beyond the grave. Of the true way of peace through a Redeemer, of God’s love in Christ, of free grace, of complete absolution from guilt, of a resurrection to life eternal, they have no knowledge. For long weary centuries they have been waiting for the tardy movements of the Church of Christ, while Christians have been asleep, or wasting their energies on useless controversies, and squabbling and wrangling about forms and ceremonies. Is not this a sight which ought to “stir the spirit”?

I ask you, next, to turn back to our own land, and consider the state of our great cities. There are districts in our great metropolis, in Liverpool, in Manchester, in Birmingham, in the Black Country, where Christianity seems practically unknown. Examine the religious condition of East London, or of Southwark, or Lambeth. Walk through the north end of Liverpool on Saturday evening, or Sunday, or on a Bank Holiday, and see how Sabbath-breaking, intemperance, and general ungodliness appear to rule and reign uncontrolled. “When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.” (Luke xi. 21.) And then remember that this state of things exists in a professedly Christian country, in a land where there is an Established Church, and within a few hours of Oxford and Cambridge! Once more I say, ought not these things to “stir” our hearts?

Reader, it is a sorrowful fact that there is around us in the present day a generation of men who regard heathenism, infidelity, and irreligion with apathy, coolness, and indifference? They care nothing for Christian Missions either at home or abroad. They see no necessity for them. They take no interest in the Evangelistic work of any Church or society. They treat all alike with undisguised contempt. They despise Exeter Hall. They never give subscriptions. They never attend meetings. They never read a Missionary Report. They seem to think that every man shall be saved by his own law or sect, if he is only *sincere;* and that one religion is as good as another, if those who profess it are only *in earnest.* They are fond of decrying and running down all spiritual machinery or Missionary operations. They are constantly asserting that modern Missions at home or abroad do nothing, and that those who support them are little better than weak enthusiasts. Judging by their language, they appear to think that the world receives no benefit from Missions and aggressive Christian movements, and that it would be a better way to leave the world alone!

What shall we say to these men? They meet us on every side. They are to be heard in every society. To sit by, and sneer, and criticise, and do nothing-this is apparently their delight and vocation. What shall we say to them?

Let us tell them plainly, if they will only hear us, that they are utterly opposed to the Apostle St. Paul. Let us show them that mighty model of a Christian Missionary walking the streets of Athens, and “stirred” in spirit at the sight of a “city wholly given to idolatry.” Let us ask them why they do not feel as he felt, about the idolatry of China and Hindustan, of Africa and the South Seas, or about the semi-heathen districts of London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and the Black Country. Let us ask them whether 1900 years have made any difference in the nature of God, the necessities of fallen man, the sinfulness of idol worship, and the duty of Christians. We shall ask in vain for a reasonable answer: we shall get none. Sneers at our weakness are no argument against our principles. Jests at our infirmities and failures are no proof that our aims are wrong. Yes! they may have the wit and wisdom of this world upon their side; but the eternal principles of the New Testament are written clearly, plainly, and unmistakably. So long as the Bible is the Bible, charity to souls is one of the first of Christian graces, and it is a solemn duty to feel for the souls of the heathen, and of all unconverted people. He who knows nothing of this feeling has yet to become a learner in Christ’s school, He who despises this feeling is not a successor of St. Paul, but a follower of him who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”-even of Cain.

III. I ask you to observe, in the last place, *what St. Paul* DID *at Athens.* What he *saw* you have heard; what he *felt* you have been told; but how did he *act?*

He *did something.* He was not the man to stand still and “confer with flesh and blood” in the face of a city full of idols. He might have reasoned with himself that he stood alone,-that he was a Jew by birth,-that he was a stranger in a strange land,-that he had to oppose the rooted prejudices and old associations of learned men,-that to attack the old religion of a whole city was to beard a lion in his den,-that the doctrines of the Gospel were little likely to be effective on minds steeped in Greek philosophy. But none of these thoughts seem to have crossed the mind of St. Paul. He saw souls perishing; he felt that life was short, and time passing away; he had confidence in the power of his Master’s message to meet every man’s soul; he had received mercy himself, and knew not how to hold his peace. He acted at once; and what his hand found to do, he did with his might. Oh! that we had more men of action in these days!

And he did what he did *with holy wisdom,* as well as holy boldness. He commenced aggressive measures alone, and waited not for companions and helpers. But he commenced them with consummate skill, and in a manner most likely to obtain a footing for the Gospel. First, we are told, he disputed “with the Jews” in the synagogue, and the “devout persons” or proselytes who attended the Jewish worship. Afterwards he went on to *“dispute,”* or hold discussions, “in the market daily with them that met with him.” He advanced step by step like an experienced general. Here, as elsewhere, St. Paul is a model to us: he combined fiery zeal and boldness with judicious tact and sanctified common sense. Oh! that we had more men of wisdom in these days!

But what did the Apostle teach? What was the grand subject which he argued, and reasoned out, and discussed, both with Jew and Greek, in synagogue and street? That he exposed the folly of idolatry to the ignorant multitudes,-that he showed the true nature of God to the worshippers of images made with hands,-that he asserted the nearness of God to us all,-and the certainty of a solemn reckoning with God at the judgment day, to Epicureans and Stoics, these are facts which we have recorded fully in his address on Mars’ Hill.

But is there nothing more than this to be learnt about the Apostle’s dealings with the idolatrous city? Is there nothing more distinctive and peculiar to Christianity which St. Paul brought forward at Athens? There is indeed more. There is a sentence in the 18th verse of the chapter we are looking at, which ought to be written in letters of gold-a sentence which ought to silence for ever the impudent assertion, which some have dared to make, that the great Apostle of the Gentiles was sometimes content to be a mere teacher of deism or natural theology! We are told in the 18th verse that one thing which arrested the attention of the Athenians was the fact that St. Paul preached “Jesus and the resurrection.”

Jesus and the resurrection! What a mine of matter that sentence contained! What a complete summary of the Christian faith might be drawn from those words! That they are only meant to be a summary, I have no doubt. I pity those who would cramp and pare down their meaning, and interpret them as nothing more than Christ’s prophetical office and example. I think it incredible that the very Apostle who a few days after went to Corinth, “determined to know nothing but Christ crucified,” or the doctrine of the cross, would keep back the cross from Athenian ears. I believe that “Jesus and the resurrection” is a sentence which stands for the whole Gospel. The Founder’s name, and one of the foundation facts of the Gospel, stand before us for the whole of Christianity.

What, then, does this sentence mean? What are we to understand St. Paul preached?

*(a)* St. Paul at Athens preached the *person* of the Lord Jesus,-His divinity, His incarnation, His mission into the world to save sinners, His life, and death, and ascension up to heaven, His character, His teaching, His amazing love to the souls of men.

*(b)* St. Paul at Athens preached the *work* of the Lord Jesus,-His sacrifice upon the cross, His vicarious satisfaction for sin, His substitution as the just for the unjust, the full redemption He has procured for all, and specially effected for all who believe, the complete victory He has obtained for lost man over sin, death, and hell.

*(c)* St. Paul at Athens preached the *offices* of the Lord Jesus,-as the one Mediator between God and all mankind, as the great Physician for all sin-sick souls, as the Rest-giver and Peace-maker for all heavy-laden hearts, as the Friend of the friendless, the High Priest and Advocate of all who commit their souls into His hands, the Ransom-payer of captives, the Light and Guide of all wandering from God.

*(d)* St. Paul at Athens preached the *terms* which the Lord Jesus had commanded His servants to proclaim to all the world;-His readiness and willingness to receive at once the chief of sinners; His ability to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him; the full, present, and immediate forgiveness which He offers to all who believe; the complete cleansing in His blood for all manner of sin; faith, or simple trust of heart, the one thing required of all who feel their sins and desire to be saved; entire justification without works, or doing, or deeds of law for all who believe.

(e) Last, but not least, St. Paul preached at Athens the *resurrection* of the Lord Jesus. He preached it as the miraculous fact on which Jesus Himself staked the whole credibility of His mission, and as a fact proved by such abounding evidence that no caviller at miracles has ever yet honestly dared to meet.-He preached it as a fact, which was the very top-stone of the whole work of redemption, proving that what Christ undertook He fully accomplished, that the ransom was accepted, the atonement completed, and the prison doors thrown open forever.-He preached it as a fact, proving beyond doubt the possibility and certainty of our own resurrection in the flesh, and settling forever the great question, “Can God raise the dead?”

These things and many like them I cannot doubt St. Paul preached at Athens. I cannot for one moment suppose that he taught one thing at one place and one at another. The Holy Ghost supplies the substance of his preaching in that rich sentence, “Jesus and the resurrection.” The same Holy Ghost has told us fully how he handled these subjects at Antioch in Pisidia, at Philippi, at Corinth, and Ephesus. The Acts and the Epistles speak out on this point with no uncertain sound. I believe that “Jesus and the resurrection” means-Jesus and the redemption He effected by His death and rising from the grave, His atoning blood, His cross, His substitution, His mediation, His triumphant entrance into heaven, and the consequent full and complete salvation of all sinners who believe in Him. This is the doctrine St. Paul preached. This is the work St. Paul did when he was at Athens.

Reader, have we nothing to learn from these doings of the great Apostle of the Gentiles? There are lessons of deep importance to which I venture briefly to invite your attention. I say briefly. Time forbids me to dwell on them at any length. I only throw them out, as seeds for private thought.

(a) Learn, for one thing, a *doctrinal lesson* from St. Paul’s doings at Athens. The grand subject of our teaching in every place ought to be Jesus Christ. However learned or however unlearned, however high-born or however humble our audience, Christ crucified-Christ-Christ,-Christ-crucified, rising, interceding, redeeming, pardoning, receiving, saving-Christ must be the grand theme of our teaching. We shall never mend this Gospel. We shall never find any other subject which will do so much good. We must sow as St. Paul sowed, if we would reap as St. Paul reaped.

*(b)* Learn, for another thing, a *practical lesson* from St. Paul’s doings at Athens. We must never be afraid to stand alone and be solitary witnesses for Christ, if need be,-alone in a vast ungodly parish, in our own land,-alone in East London, in Liverpool, in Manchester,-alone in Delhi, or Benares, or Pekin,-it matters not. We need not hold our peace, if God’s truth be on our side. One Paul at Athens, one Athanasius against the world, one Wycliffe against a host of Romish prelates, one Luther at Worms,-these, these, are lighthouses before our eyes. God sees not as man sees. We must not stand still to count heads and number the people. One man, with Christ in his heart and the Bible in his hands, is stronger than a myriad of idolaters.

*(c)* Learn the importance, let me rather say the necessity, of asserting boldly the *supernatural element* as an essential part of the Christian religion. I need not tell many who read these pages that unbelievers and sceptics abound in these days, who make a dead set at the miracles of the Bible, and are incessantly trying to throw them overboard as useless lumber, or to prove by ingenious explanations that they are fables and no miracles at all. Let us never be afraid to resist such teaching steadily, and to take our stand by the side of St. Paul. Like him, let us point to the resurrection of Christ, and confidently challenge all fair and reasonable men to refute the evidence by which it is supported. The enemies of supernatural religion never have refuted that evidence, and they never will. If Christ was not raised from the dead, the conduct and teaching of the Apostles after He left the world is an unsolved problem and a perfect mystery, which no man in his senses can account for. But if, as we believe, the resurrection of Christ is an undeniable fact which cannot be disproved, the whole fabric of sceptical arguments against supernatural religion is undermined, and must fall to the ground. The stupendous miracle of the resurrection of Christ once admitted, it is sheer nonsense to tell us that any other smaller miracle in the Bible is incredible or impossible.

*(d)* Learn, for one thing more, a *lesson of encouragement to faith* from St. Paul’s doings at Athens. If we preach the Gospel, we may preach with perfect confidence that it will do good. That solitary Jew of Tarsus who stood up alone on Mars’ Hill appeared at the time to do little or nothing. He passed on his way and seemed to have made a failure. The Stoics and Epicureans probably laughed and sneered as if the day was their own. But that solitary Jew was lighting a candle that has never since been put out. The Word that he proclaimed in Athens grew and multiplied and became a great tree. That little leaven ultimately leavened the whole of Greece. The Gospel that Paul preached triumphed over idolatry. The empty Parthenon stands to this day, a proof that Athenian theology is dead and gone. Yes! if we sow good seed, we may sow it in tears, but we shall yet “come again with joy, bringing our sheaves with us.” (Psalm cxxvi. 6.)

I draw towards a conclusion. I pass from the consideration of what St. Paul *saw*, and *felt,* and *did* at Athens to points of practical importance. I ask every reader of this paper to-day what ought we to see, to feel, and to do?

(1) *What ought we to see ?* It is an age of sight-seeing and excitement. “The eye is not satisfied with seeing.” (Eccles. i. 8.) The world is mad after running to and fro, and the increase of knowledge. The wealth, the arts, the inventions of man are continually gathering myriads into Great Exhibitions. Thousands and tens of thousands are annually rushing about and gazing at the work of men’s hands.

But ought not the Christian to look at the map of the world? Ought not the man who believes the Bible to gaze with solemn thoughts on the vast spaces in that map which are yet spiritually black, dead, and without the Gospel? Ought not our eyes to look at the fact that half the population of the earth is yet ignorant of God and Christ, and yet sitting still in sin and idolatry, and that myriads of our own fellow-countrymen in our great cities are practically little better than heathen, because Christians do so little for souls?

Reader, the eyes of God see these things, and our eyes ought to see them too.

(2) What *ought we to feel?* Our hearts, if they are right in the sight of God, ought to be affected by the sight of irreligion and heathenism. Many indeed are the feelings which the aspect of the world ought to call up in our hearts.

*Thankfulness* we ought to feel for our own countless privileges. Little indeed do the bulk of English people know the amount of their own daily unpaid debt to Christianity. Well would it be for some if they could be compelled to dwell for a few weeks every year in a heathen land.

*Shame and humiliation* we ought to feel when we reflect how little the Church of England has done for the spread of Christianity hitherto. God has indeed done great things for us since time days when Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer went to the stake,-has preserved us through many trials, and has enriched us with many blessings. But how little return we have made Him! How few of our 15,000 parishes do anything worthy of the cause of Missions at home or abroad! How little zeal some congregations show for the salvation of souls! These things ought not so to be!

*Compassion* we ought to feel when we think of the wretched state of unconverted souls, and the misery of all men and women who live and die without Christ. No poverty like this poverty! No disease like this disease! No slavery like this slavery! No death like this-death in idolatry, irreligion, and sin! Well may we ask ourselves, Where is the mind of Christ, if we do not feel for the lost? Reader, I lay it down boldly, as a great principle, that the Christianity which does not make a man feel for the state of unconverted people is not the Christianity which came down from heaven 1900 years ago, and is embalmed in the New Testament. It is a mere empty name. It is not the Christianity of St. Paul.

(3) Finally, reader, *what ought we to do?* This, after all, is the point to which I want to bring your mind. Seeing and feeling are well ; but doing is the life of religion. Passive impressions which do not lend to action have a tendency to harden the conscience, and do us positive harm. What ought we to do? We ought to do much more than we have ever done yet. We might all probably do more. The honour of the Gospel, the state of the Missionary field abroad, the condition of our overgrown cities at home, all call upon us to do more.

Need we stand still and be ashamed of the weapons of our warfare? Is the Gospel, the old Evangelical creed, unequal to the wants of our day? I assert boldly that we have no cause to be ashamed of the Gospel at all. It is not worn out. It is not effete. It is not behind the times. ‘We want nothing new, nothing added to the Gospel, nothing taken away. We want nothing but “the old paths”-the old truths fully, boldly, affectionately proclaimed. Only preach the Gospel fully, the same Gospel which St. Paul preached, and it is still “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,” and nothing else called religion has any real power at all. (Rom. i. 16.)

Need we stand still and be ashamed of the *results* of preaching the Gospel? Shall we hang down our heads, and complain that “the faith once delivered to the saints” has lost its power, and does no good? We have no cause to be ashamed at all. I am bold to say that no religious teaching on earth can point to any results worth mentioning except that which is called doctrinal, dogmatic theology. What deliverance on earth have all the modern schools-which scorn dogmatic teaching-what deliverance have they wrought? What over-grown and semi-heathen parishes in the metropolis, in our great seaports, our manufacturing towns, our colliery districts, have they evangelized and civilized? What New Zealand, what Red River, what Sierra Leone, what Tinnevelly can the high-sounding systems of this latter day point to as a fruit of their system? No! reader, if the question, “What is truth?” is to be solved by reference to results and fruits, the religion of the New Testament, the religion whose principles are summarised, condensed, and embalmed in our Articles, Creeds, and Prayer-book, has no cause to be ashamed.

What can we do now but humble ourselves for the past and endeavour, by God’s help, to do more for time to come? Let us open our eyes more, and see.

Let us open our hearts more, and feel. Let us stir up ourselves to do more work-by self-denying gifts, by zealous co-operation, by bold advocacy, by fervent prayer. Let us do something worthy of our cause. The cause for which Jesus left heaven and came down to earth deserves the best that we can do.

And now, reader, let me close this paper by returning to the thought with which it began. Perhaps your lot is cast in a city or town. The population of our rural districts is annually decreasing. The dwellers in towns are rapidly outnumbering the dwellers in country parishes. If you are a dweller in a town, accept the parting words of advice which I am about to offer. Give me your best attention while I speak to you about your soul.

(1) Remember, for one thing, that you are placed in a position of peculiar spiritual danger. From the days of Babel downwards, wherever Adam’s children have been assembled in large numbers, they have always drawn one another to the utmost extremities of sin and wickedness. The great towns have always been Satan’s seat. It is the town where the young man sees abounding examples of ungodliness; and, if he is determined to live in sin, will always find plenty of companions. It is the town where the theatre and the casino, the dancing room and the drinking bar, are continually crowded. It is the town where the love of money, or the love of amusement, or the love of sensual indulgence, lead captive myriads of slaves. It is the town where a man will always find hundreds to encourage him in breaking the Sabbath, despising the means of grace, neglecting the Bible, leaving off the habit of prayer. Reader, consider these things. If you live in a town, take care. Know your danger. Feel your weakness and sinfulness. Flee to Christ, and commit your soul to His keeping. Ask Him to hold you up, and you will he safe. Stand on your guard. Resist the devil. Watch and pray.

(2) Remember, on the other hand, if you live in a town, you will probably have some special help which you cannot always find in the country. There are few English towns in which you will not find a few faithful servants of Christ., who will gladly assist you and aid you in your journey towards heaven. Few indeed are the English towns in which you will not find some minister who preaches time Gospel, and some pilgrims in the narrow way who are ready to welcome any addition to their number.

Reader, be of good courage, and never give way to the despairing thought that it is impossible to serve Christ in a town. Think rather that with God nothing is impossible. Think of the long list of witnesses who have carried the cross, and been faithful unto death in the midst of the greatest temptations. Think of Daniel and the three children in Babylon. Think of the saints in Nero’s household at Rome. Think of the multitudes of believers at Corinth and Ephesus and Antioch in the days of the apostles. It is not place but grace that makes the Christian. The holiest and most useful servants of God who have ever lived were not hermits in the wilderness, but dwellers in towns.

Reader, remember these things, and be of good cheer. Your lot may be cast in a city like Athens, “wholly given to idolatry.” You may have to stand alone in the bank, the counting house, the place of business, or the shop. But you are not really alone, if Christ is with you. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Be bold, thorough, decided, and patient. The day will come when you will find that even in a great city a man may be a happy, useful Christian, respected while he lives, and honoured when he dies.

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**I would like to think that most of us have become convinced of the primacy of what might generically be called worldview evangelism.** In the recent past, at least in North America and Europe, evangelism consisted of a fairly aggressive presentation of one small part of the Bible’s story line. Most non-Christians to whom we presented the gospel shared enough common language and outlook with us that we did not find it necessary to unpack the entire plot line of the Bible.

A mere quarter of a century ago, if we were dealing with an atheist, he or she was not a generic atheist but a Christian atheist-that is, the God he or she did not believe in was more or less a god of discernibly Judeo-Christian provenance. The atheist was not particularly denying the existence of Hindu gods — Krishna, perhaps — but the God of the Bible. But that meant that the categories were still ours. The domain of discourse was ours.

When I was a child, if I had said, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,” 80 percent of the kids in my school could have responded, “Hail the incarnate deity.” That was because Christmas carols like “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” were sung in home, church, school, and street. These kids may not have understood all-the words, but this domain of Christian discourse was still theirs. Young people at university doubtless imbibed massive doses of naturalism, but in most English departments it was still assumed you could not plumb the vast heritage of English poetry if you possessed no knowledge of the language, metaphors, themes, and categories of the Bible.

In those days, then, evangelism presupposed that most unbelievers, whether they were atheists or agnostics or deists or theists, nevertheless knew that the Bible begins with God, that this God is both personal and transcendent, that he made the universe and made it good, and that the Fall introduced sin and attracted the curse. Virtually everyone knew that the Bible has two Testaments. History moves in a straight line. There is a difference between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error, fact and fiction. They knew that Christians believe there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be feared. Christmas is bound up with Jesus’ birth; Good Friday and Easter, with Jesus’ death and resurrection. Those were the givens.

So what we pushed in evangelism was the seriousness of sin, the freedom of grace, who Jesus really is, what his death is about, and the urgency of repentance and faith. That was evangelism. Of course, we tilted things in certain ways depending on the people we were addressing; the focus was different when evangelizing in different subcultural settings— in the Bible Belt, for instance, or in an Italian-Catholic section of New York, or in an Ivy League university. But for most of us, evangelism was connected with articulating and pressing home a very small part of the Bible’s plot line.

In many seminaries like Trinity, of course, we recognized that missionaries being trained to communicate the gospel in radically different cultures needed something more. A missionary to Japan or Thailand or north India would have to learn not only another language or two but also another culture. No less important, they would have to begin their evangelism farther back, because many of their hearers would have no knowledge of the Bible at all and would tenaciously hold to some worldview structures that were fundamentally at odds with the Bible. The best schools gave such training to their missionary candidates. But pastors and campus workers were rarely trained along such lines. After all, they were doing nothing more than evangelizing people who shared their own cultural assumptions, or at least people located in the same domain of discourse, weren’t they?

We were naive, of course. We were right, a quarter of a century ago, when we sang, “The times they are a-changin’.” Of course, there were many places in America where you could evangelize churchy people who still retained substantial elements of a Judeo-Christian worldview. There are still places like that today: the over-fifties in the Midwest, parts of the Bible Belt. But in the New England states, in the Pacific Northwest, in universities almost anywhere in the country, in pockets of the population such as media people, and in many parts of the entire Western world, the degree of biblical illiteracy cannot be overestimated. One of my students commented a week ago that he was walking in Chicago with his girlfriend, who had a wooden cross hanging from a chain around her neck. A lad stopped her on the sidewalk and asked why she had a plus sign for a necklace. The people whom we evangelize on university campuses usually do not know that the Bible has two Testaments. As Phillip Jensen says, you have to explain to them the purpose of the big numbers and little numbers. They have never heard of Abraham, David, Solomon, Paul — let alone Haggai or Zechariah. They may have heard of Moses, but only so as to confuse him with Charlton Heston.

But this analysis is still superficial. My point is not so much that these people are ignorant of biblical data (though that is true) as that, having lost touch with the Judeo-Christian heritage that in one form or another (sometimes bowdlerized) long nourished the West, they are not clean slates waiting for us to write on them. They are not empty hard drives waiting for us to download our Christian files onto them. Rather, they have inevitably developed an array of alternative worldviews. They are hard drives full of many other files that collectively constitute various non-Christian frames of reference.

**The implications for evangelism are immense. I shall summarize four.**

***First, the people we wish to evangelize hold some fundamental positions that they are going to have to abandon to become Christians.*** To continue my computer analogy, they retain numerous files that are going to have to be erased or revised, because as presently written, those files are going to clash formidably with Christian files. At one level, of course, that is always so. That is why the gospel demands repentance and faith; indeed, it demands the regenerating, transforming work of the Spirit of God. But the less there is of a common, shared worldview between “evangelizer” and “evangelizee,” between the biblically informed Christian and the biblically illiterate postmodern, the more traumatic the transition, the more decisive the change, the more stuff has to be unlearned.

***Second, under these conditions evangelism means starting farther back.*** The good news of Jesus Christ — who he is and what he accomplished by his death, resurrection, and exaltation — is simply incoherent unless certain structures are already in place. You cannot make heads or tails of the real Jesus unless you have categories for the personal/transcendent God of the Bible; the nature of human beings made in the image of God; the sheer odium of rebellion against him; the curse that our rebellion has attracted; the spiritual, personal, familial, and social effects of our transgression; the nature of salvation; the holiness and wrath and love of God. One cannot make sense of the Bible’s plot line without such basic ingredients; one cannot make sense of the Bible’s portrayal of Jesus without such blocks in place. We cannot possibly agree on the solution that Jesus provides if we cannot agree on the problem he confronts. **That is why our evangelism must be “worldview” evangelism.** I shall flesh out what this means in a few moments.

***Third, not for a moment am I suggesting that worldview evangelism is a restrictively propositional exercise.*** It is certainly not less than propositional; the Bible not only presents us with many propositions, but it insists in some cases that unless one believes those propositions one is lost. The point can easily be confirmed by a close reading of the gospel of John. For all its complementary perspectives, it repeatedly makes statements like “Unless you believe that . . .” One really ought not be forced to choose between propositions and relational faith any more than one should be forced to choose between the left wing of an airplane and the right. At its core, worldview evangelism is as encompassing as the Bible. We are called not only to certain propositional confession but also to loyal faith in Jesus Christ, the truth incarnate; to repentance from dead works to serve the living God; to life transformed by the Holy Spirit, given to us in anticipation of the consummated life to come; to a new community that lives and loves and behaves in joyful and principled submission to the Word of the King, our Maker and Redeemer. This massive worldview touches everything, embraces everything. It can be simply put, for it has a center; it can be endlessly expounded and lived out, for in its scope it has no restrictive perimeter.

***Fourth, the evangelist must find ways into the values, heart, thought patterns — in short, the worldview — of those who are being evangelized but must not let that non-Christian worldview domesticate the biblical message.*** The evangelist must find bridges into the other’s frame of reference, or no communication is possible; the evangelist will remain ghettoized. Nevertheless, faithful worldview evangelism under these circumstances will sooner or later find the evangelist trying to modify or destroy some of the alien worldview an d to present another entire structure of thought and conduct that is unimaginably more glorious, coherent, consistent, and finally true.

All of this, of course, the apostle Paul well understood. In particular, by his own example he teaches us the difference between evangelizing those who largely share your biblical worldview and evangelizing those who are biblically illiterate. In Acts 13:16-41, we read Paul’s evangelistic address in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. The setting, a synagogue, ensures that his hearers are Jews, Gentile proselytes to Judaism, and Godfearers — in every case, people thoroughly informed by the Bible (what we would today call the Old Testament). In this context, Paul selectively narrates Old Testament history in order to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah. He quotes biblical texts, reasons his way through them, and argues that the resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of biblical prophecies about the Holy One in David’s line not seeing decay From Jesus’ resurrection, Paul argues back to Jesus’ death and its significance — ultimately, the forgiveness of sins and justification before God (vv. 38-39). Paul ends with a biblical passage warning of fearful judgment against skepticism and unbelief. Here, then, is the apostolic equivalent to evangelism among churchy folk, biblically literate folk-the kind of people who already, at a certain level, know their Bibles.

In Acts 17:16-34, however, one finds the apostle Paul evangelizing intelligent Athenians who are utterly biblically illiterate. Here his approach is remarkably different, and has much to teach us as we attempt to evangelize a new generation of biblical illiterates.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him.

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

I have organized the rest of what I have to say under four topics: the realities Paul faces, the priorities he adopts, the framework he establishes, and the nonnegotiable gospel he preaches.

**(1) THE REALITIES PAUL FACES**

Apart from their obvious biblical illiteracy — these Athenian intellectuals had never heard of Moses, never cracked a Bible — three features of this culture are striking.

***First, the Roman Empire was characterized not only by large-scale empirical pluralism but also by government-sponsored religious pluralism.*** The Romans knew that a captive people were more likely to rebel if they could align religion, land, and people. Partly to break up this threefold cord, the Romans insisted on adopting into their own pantheon some of the gods of any newly subjugated people, and they insisted equally strongly that the newly subjugated people adopt some of the Roman gods. In any potential civil war, therefore, it would be quite unclear which side the gods were helping — and this policy of god-swaps strengthened the likelihood of imperial peace. It also meant that religious pluralism was not only endemic to the Empire but was buttressed by the force of law After all, it was a capital offense to desecrate a temple — any temple. But let no temple and no God challenge Washington — I mean Rome.

***Second, like us, Paul was dealing not with people who were biblically illiterate and therefore had no worldview, but with people who vociferously argued for various competing and powerful worldviews.***

Two are mentioned in the text: *Epicurean and Stoic* (v. 18). In the first century, philosophy did not have the fairly esoteric and abstract connotations it has today, connected with minor departments in large universities. It referred to an entire way of life, based on a rigorous and self-consistent intellectual system — close to what we mean by worldview The ideal of Epicurean philosophy, Epicurean worldview, was an undisturbed life — a life of tranquility, untroubled by undue involvement in human affairs.

The gods themselves are composed of atoms so fine they live in calmness in the spaces between the worlds. As the gods are nicely removed from the hurly-burly of life, so human beings should seek the same ideal. But over against this vision, as we shall see, Paul presents a God who is actively involved in this world as its Creator, providential Ruler, Judge, and self-disclosing Savior.

Stoic philosophy thought of god as all-pervasive, more or less in a pantheistic sense, so that the human ideal was to live life in line with what is ultimately real, to conduct life in line with this god/principle of reason, which must rule over emotion and passion. Stoicism, as someone has commented, was “marked by great moral earnestness and a high sense of duty.” Against such a vision, the God that Paul presents, far from being pantheistic, is personal, distinct from the creation, and is our final judge. Instead of focusing on “universal reason tapped into by human reasoning,” Paul contrasts divine will and sovereignty with human dependence and need. In short, there is a massive clash of worldviews.

Of course, there were other Greek and Latin worldviews. There is no mention here of the sophists or of the atheistic philosophical materialists such as Lucretius. What is clear is that Paul here finds himself evangelizing men and women deeply committed to one fundamentally alien worldview or another.

***Third, no less striking is the sneering tone of condescension they display in verse 18: What is this babbler trying to say?*** — this “seed picker,” this little bird fluttering around picking up disconnected scraps of incoherent information, this second-class mind? Others remarked, He seems to be advocating foreign gods. Of course, as it turns out, some of these people become genuinely interested in the gospel. The tenor of condescension is unmistakable, however, when an alien worldview feels secure in its thoughtless majority.

These, then, are the realities Paul faces.

**(2) THE PRIORITIES PAUL ADOPTS**

The most immediate and striking response of the apostle Paul to all that he witnesses in Athens is an intuitively biblical analysis: he is greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols (v. 16). Paul might have been overwhelmed by Athens’ reputation as the Oxford or Cambridge or Harvard of the ancient world (though universities per se did not then exist). He might have admired the architecture, gaping at the Parthenon. But Paul is neither intimidated nor snookered by Athens; he sees the idolatry. How we need Christians in our universities and high places who are neither impressed nor intimidated by reputation and accomplishment if it is nothing more than idolatry!

The apostle sets out, then, to evangelize. He aims at two quite different groups. As usual, he attaches a certain priority to evangelizing Jews and Godfearing Gentiles, the churchy folk, the biblically literate people; he reasons in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks (v. 17a). He has a theological reason for this priority that we cannot examine here, but in any case we must never forget to evangelize such people. Second, he evangelizes the ordinary pagans who have no connection with the Bible: he evangelizes day by day in the market place, targeting anyone who happens to be there, most of whom would have been biblically illiterate (v. 17b). He does not wait for an invitation to the Areopagus. He simply gets on with his evangelism, and the invitation to the Areopagus is the result (v. 18).

***These, then, are his priorities: God-centered cultural analysis, and persistent evangelism of both biblical literates and biblical illiterates.***

Perhaps I should add that there is at least one fundamental difference between Paul’s situation and ours. When Paul evangelizes biblical illiterates, he is dealing with people whose heritage has not in recent centuries had anything to do with biblical religion. ***So when they react negatively to him, they do so solely because, from their perspective, his frame of reference is so alien to their own. They are not rejecting him in part because they are still running away from their own heritage. That is the additional problem we sometimes face. We sometimes deal with men and women who have adopted a worldview that is not only at several points profoundly antithetical to a biblical worldview but also self-consciously chosen over against that biblical worldview.*** That opens up some opportunities for us, but it raises some additional barriers as well. However, we cannot probe these opportunities and barriers here. It is enough to observe the priorities that Paul adopts.

**(3) THE FRAMEWORK PAUL ESTABLISHES**

Here it will be helpful to run through Paul’s argument from 17:22 to 17:31. Before I do so, however, I want to make three preliminary observations.

***First, it takes you about two minutes to read this record of Paul’s address. But speeches before the Areopagus were not known for their brevity. In other words, we must remember that this is a condensed report of a much longer speech.*** Doubtless every sentence, in some cases every clause, constituted a point that Paul expanded upon at length.

***Second, if you want to know a little more closely just how he would have expanded each point, it is easier to discover than some people think***. For there are many points of comparison between these sermon notes and, for instance, Romans. I’ll draw attention to one or two of the parallels as we move on.

***Third, there is a fascinating choice of vocabulary.*** It has often been shown that many of the expressions in this address, especially in the early parts, are the sorts of things one would have found in Stoic circles. Yet in every case, Paul tweaks them so that in his context they convey the peculiar emphases he wants to assign to them. In other words, **the vocabulary is linguistically appropriate to his hearers**, but at the level of the sentence and the paragraph, Paul in this report is saying just what he wants to say; he is establishing a biblical worldview.

Now let us scan the framework Paul establishes.

***First, he establishes that God is the creator of the world and everything in it (17:24).*** How much he enlarged on this point we cannot be certain, but we know from his other writings how his mind ran. The creation establishes that God is other than the created order; pantheism is ruled out. It also establishes human accountability; we owe our Creator everything, and to defy him and set ourselves up as the center of the universe is the heart of all sin. Worse, to cherish and worship created things instead of the Creator is the essence of idolatry.

***Second, Paul insists that God is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands (v. 24).*** The sovereignty of God over the whole universe stands over against views that assign this god or that goddess a particular domain — perhaps the sea (Neptune), or tribal gods with merely regional or ethnic interests. The God of the Bible is sovereign over everything. This teaching grounds the doctrine of providence. Because of the universality of his reign, God cannot be domesticated — not even by temples (v. 24). Paul is not denying the historical importance of the temple in

Jerusalem, still less that God uniquely disclosed himself there. Rather, he denies that God is limited to temples, and that he can be domesticated or squeezed or tapped into by the cultus of any temple (which of course threatens popular pagan practice). He is so much bigger than that.

***Third, God is the God of aseity: he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything (17:25).*** Aseity is a word now largely fallen into disuse, though it was common in Puritan times. Etymologically it comes from the Latin *a se* — “from himself.” *God is so utterly “from himself” that he does not need us; he is not only self-existent (a term we often deploy with respect to God’s origins — the existence of everything else is God-dependent, but God himself is self-existent), but he is utterly independent of his created order so far as his own well-being or contentment or existence are concerned.* God does not need us — a very different perspective from that of polytheism, where human beings and gods interact in all kinds of ways bound up with the finiteness and needs of the gods. The God of the Bible would not come to us if, rather whimsically, he wanted a McDonald’s hamburger; the cattle on a thousand hills are already his.

***Fourth, the truth of the matter is the converse: we are utterly dependent on him — he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (v. 25b).*** This strips us of our vaunted independence; it is the human correlative of the doctrines of creation and providence.

***Fifth, from theology proper, Paul turns to anthropology. He insists that all nations descended from one man (v. 26).*** This contradicts not a few ancient notions of human descent, which conjectured that different ethnic groups came into being in quite different ways. But Paul has a universal gospel that is based on a universal problem (cf. Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15). If sin and death were introduced into the one human race by one man such that the decisive act of another man is required to reverse them, then it is important for Paul to get the anthropology right so that the soteriology is right. We cannot agree on the solution if we cannot agree on the problem. But Paul’s stance has yet wider implications; there is no trace of racism here. Moreover, however much he holds that God has enjoyed a peculiar covenant relationship with Israel, because he is a monotheist, Paul holds that God must be sovereign over all the nations. Did he, perhaps, develop some of the lines of argument one finds in Isaiah 40ff.? If there is but one God, that God must in some sense be the God of all, whether his being and status are recognized by all or not.

***Sixth, for the first time one finds an explicit reference to something wrong in this universe that God created. His providential rule over all was with the purpose that some would reach out for him and find him (v. 27).*** In short order Paul will say much more about sin (without actually using the word). Here he is preparing the way. The assumption is that the race as a whole does not know the God who made them. Something has gone profoundly wrong.

***Seventh, although it has been important for him to establish God’s transcendence, Paul does not want such an emphasis to drift toward what would later be called deism. The God he has in mind is not far from each one of us (v. 27). He is immanent.*** Paul will not allow any suspicion that God is careless or indifferent about people; he is never far from us. Moreover, the apostle recognizes that some of this truth is acknowledged in some pagan religions. When Greek thought (or much of it) spoke of one “God” as opposed to many gods, very often the assumption was more or less pantheistic. That structure of thought Paul has already ruled out. Still, some of its emphases were not wrong if put within a better framework. We live and move and have our being in this God, and we are his offspring (17:28) — not, for Paul, in some pantheistic sense, but as an expression of God’s personal and immediate concern for our well-being.

***Eighth, the entailment of this theology and this anthropology is to clarify what sin is and to make idolatry utterly reprehensible (v. 29).*** Doubtless Paul enlarged this point very much in terms of, say, Isaiah 44-45 and Romans 1. For he cannot rightly introduce Jesus and his role as Savior until he establishes what the problem is; he cannot make the good news clear until he elucidates the bad news from which the good news rescues us.

***Ninth, Paul also introduces what might be called a philosophy of history — or better, perhaps, a certain view of time.*** Many Greeks in the ancient world thought that time went round and round in circles. Paul establishes a linear framework: creation at a fixed point; a long period that is past with respect to Paul’s present in which God acted in a certain way (In the past God over-looked such ignorance); a now that is pregnant with massive changes; and a future (v. 31) that is the final termination of this world order, a time of final judgment. The massive changes of Paul’s dramatic now are bound up with the coming of Jesus and the dawning of the gospel. Paul has set the stage so as to introduce Jesus.

So here is the framework Paul establishes. He has, in fact, constructed a biblical worldview. But he has not done so simply for the pleasure of creating a worldview. In this context he has done so in order to provide a framework in which Jesus himself, not least his death and resurrection, makes sense. Otherwise nothing that Paul wants to say about Jesus will make sense.

This is the framework Paul establishes.

**(4) THE NONNEGOTIABLE GOSPEL PAUL PREACHES**

We read again verse 31: For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Here, at last, Jesus is introduced.

I want to emphasize two things. ***First, it is extraordinarily important to see that Paul has established the framework of the biblical metanarrative before he introduces Jesus.*** If metaphysics is a sort of big physics that explains all the other branches of physics, similarly metanarrative is the big story that explains all the other stories. By and large, postmodernists love stories, especially ambiguous or symbol-laden narratives. But they hate the metanarrative, the big story that makes all the little stories coherent. But what Paul provides is the biblical metanarrative. This is the big story in the Bible that frames and explains all the little stories. Without this big story, the accounts of Jesus will not make any sense — and Paul knows it.

For instance, if in a vague, New Age, postmodern context, we affirm something like “God loves you,” this short expression may carry a very different set of associations than we who are Christians might think. We already assume that men and women are guilty and that the clearest and deepest expression of God’s love is in the cross, where God’s own Son dealt with our sin at the expense of his own life. But if people know nothing of this story line, then the same words, “God loves you,” may be an adequate summary of the stance adopted by Jodie Foster in her recent film, *Contact*. The alien power is beneficent, wise, good, and interested in our well-being. There is nothing whatever to do with moral accountability, sin, guilt, and how God takes action to remove our sin by the death of his Son. The one vision nestles into the framework of biblical Christianity; the other nestles comfortably into the worldview of New Age optimism. ***In short, without the big story, without the metanarrative, the little story or the little expression becomes either incoherent or positively misleading.*** Paul understands the point.

***Second, what is striking is that Paul does not flinch from affirming the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.*** And that is what causes so much offense that Paul is cut off, and the Areopagus address comes to an end. Paul was thoroughly aware, of course, that most Greeks adopted some form of dualism. Matter is bad, or at least relatively bad; spirit is good. To imagine someone coming back from the dead in bodily form was not saying anything desirable, still less believable. Bodily resurrection from the dead was irrational; it was an oxymoron, like intelligent slug or boiled ice. So some of Paul’s hearers have had enough, and they openly sneer and end the meeting (v. 32). If Paul had spoken instead of Jesus’ immortality, his eternal spiritual longevity quite apart from any body, he would have caused no umbrage. But Paul does not flinch. Elsewhere he argues that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the apostles are liars, and we are still dead in our trespasses and sins (I Cor. 15). He remains faithful to that vision here. Paul does not trim the gospel to make it acceptable to the worldview of his listeners.

For Paul, then, there is some irreducible and nonnegotiable content to the gospel, content that must not be abandoned, no matter how unacceptable it is to some other worldview. It follows that especially when we are trying hard to connect wisely with some worldview other than our own, we must give no less careful attention to the nonnegotiables of the gospel, lest in our efforts to communicate wisely and with relevance, we unwittingly sacrifice what we mean to communicate.

But suddenly we overhear the muttered objection of the critic. Can it not be argued that Paul here makes a fundamental mistake? Elsewhere in Acts he frequently preaches with much greater fruitfulness, and in those cases he does not stoop to all this worldview stuff. He just preaches Jesus and his cross and resurrection, and men and women get converted. Here, a piddling number believe (v. 34). In fact, Paul’s next stop in Greece after Athens is Corinth. Reflecting later on his experiences there, Paul writes to the Corinthians and reminds them For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (I Cor. 2:2) — doubtless because he was reflecting with some sour-faced chagrin on his flawed approach in Athens. So let us be frank, the critics charge, and admit that Paul made a huge mistake in Athens and stop holding up Acts 17 as if it were a model of anything except what not to do. The man goofed: he appealed to natural theology; he tried to construct redemptive history; he attempted to form a worldview when he should have stuck to his last and preached Jesus and the cross.

I sometimes wish this reading were correct, but it is profoundly mistaken for a number of reasons.

***(1) It is not the natural reading of Acts.*** As Luke works through his book, he does not at this point in his narrative send up a red flag and warn us that at this point Paul makes a ghastly mistake. The false reading is utterly dependent on taking I Corinthians in a certain way (a mistaken way, as we shall see), and then reading it into Acts 17.

***(2) What Paul expresses, according to Luke’s report of the Areopagus address, is very much in line with Paul’s own theology, not least his theology in the opening chapters of Romans.***

***(3) Strictly speaking, Paul does not say that only a “few” men believed.*** He says *tines de andres*, “certain people,” along with *heteroi*, “others.” These are in line with other descriptions. The numbers could scarcely have been large, because the numbers in the Areopagus could not have been very large in the first place.

***(4) Transparently, Paul was cut off when he got to the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 31-32).*** But judging from all we know of him — both from a book like Romans and from the descriptions of him in Acts — we know where he would have gone from here.

***(5) That is entirely in line with the fact that what Paul had already been preaching in the marketplace to the biblically illiterate pagans was the cc gospel” (v. 18).***

***(6) At this point in his life Paul was not a rookie. Far from being fresh out of seminary and still trying to establish the precise pattern of his ministry, on any chronology he had already been through twenty years of thrilling and brutal ministry.*** Nor is this Paul’s first time among biblically illiterate pagans or among intellectuals.

***(7) In any case, I Corinthians 2 does not cast Paul’s resolve to preach Christ crucified against the background of what had happened to him in Athens.*** He does not say, in effect, “Owing to my serious mistakes in Athens, when I arrived in Corinth I resolved to preach only Christ and him crucified.” Rather, in 1 Corinthians Paul’s resolve to preach Christ crucified is cast against the background of what Christians in Corinth were attracted to — namely, to a form of triumphalism that espoused an ostensible wisdom that Paul detests. It is a wisdom full of pride and rhetoric and showmanship. Against this background, Paul takes a very different course. Knowing that believers must boast only in the Lord and follow quite a different wisdom (I Cor. 1), he resolves to preach Christ and him crucified.

***(8) In any case, it would be wrong to think that Paul has no interest in worldviews.*** Writing after I Corinthians 2, Paul can say, We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:45). The context shows that Paul is not here interested so much in disciplining the individual’s private thought life (though that certainly concerns him elsewhere) as in bringing into obedience to Christ every thought structure, every worldview, that presents opposition to his beloved Master. In other words, Paul thought “worldviewishly” (if that is not too monstrous a neologism). That is clear in many of his writings; it is clear in both 2 Corinthians 10 and in Acts 17.

***(9) Finally, the first line of Acts 17:34 is sometimes misconstrued: “A few men became followers of Paul and believed.”*** Many have assumed Luke means that a few people became Christians on the spot and followers of Paul. But that reverses what is said. Moreover, Paul has not yet given much gospel — in precisely what sense would they have become Christians? It is better to follow the text exactly Following Paul’s address, no one became a Christian on the spot. But some did become followers of Paul. In consequence, in due course they grasped the gospel and believed; they became Christians. This is entirely in line with the experience of many evangelists working in a university environment today.

A couple of years ago I spoke evangelistically at a large meeting in Oxford. So far as I know, no one became a Christian at that meeting. But sixteen students signed up for a six-week “Discovering Christianity” Bible study. A few weeks after the meeting, the curate, Vaughan Roberts, wrote me a note to tell me that eleven of the sixteen had clearly become Christians already, and he was praying for the remaining five. In other words, as a result of that meeting, some became “followers of Jesus,” and in due course believed. That is often the pattern when part of the evangelistic strategy is to establish a worldview, a frame of reference, to make the meaning of Jesus and the gospel unmistakably plain.

***In short, however sensitive Paul is to the needs and outlook of the people he is evangelizing, and however flexible he is in shaping the gospel to address them directly, we must see that there remains for him irreducible content to the gospel. That content is nonnegotiable, even if it is remarkably offensive to our hearers.*** If it is offensive, we may have to decide whether it is offensive because of the intrinsic message or because we have still not done an adequate job of establishing the frame of reference in which it alone makes sense. But the gospel itself must never be compromised.

**SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

I offer three concluding reflections. ***First, the challenge of worldview evangelism is not to make simple things complicated but to make clear to others some fairly complicated things that we simply assume.*** This can be done in fifteen minutes with the sort of presentation Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne have constructed (in Chapter 6 of Telling the Truth – “Two Ways To Live”). It might be done in seven consecutive expositions running right through the first eight chapters of Romans. It might be done with the six months of Bible teaching, beginning with Genesis, that many New Tribes Mission personnel now use before they get to Jesus. But it must be done.

***Second, the challenge of worldview evangelism is not primarily to think in philosophical categories, but it is to make it clear that closing with Jesus has content (it is connected with a real, historical Jesus about whom certain things must be said and believed) and is all-embracing (it affects conduct, relationships, values, priorities).*** It is not reducible to a preferential religious option among many, designed primarily to make me feel good about myself.

***Third, the challenge of worldview evangelism is not primarily a matter of how to get back into the discussion with biblically illiterate people whose perspectives may be very dissimilar to our own. Rather, worldview evangelism focuses primarily on where the discussion goes.*** There are many ways of getting into discussion; the crucial question is whether the Christian witness has a clear, relatively simple, straightforward grasp of what the Bible’s story line is, how it must give form to a worldview, and how the wonderful news of the gospel fits powerfully into this true story — all told in such a way that men and women can see its relevance, power, truthfulness, and life-changing capacity.

\*”*Athens Revisited*”from a conference on the topic of *Evangelism in a Post Modern Culture* held on May 13-15, 1998 at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois & sponsored by the Bannockburn Institute (www.biccc.org). All the lectures from this conference were published in the book: [***Telling The Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns***](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B003G4W4BK?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creativeASIN=B003G4W4BK&linkCode=xm2&tag=thethreshold-20), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000;