

Acts 17:10-21, Berea and Athens
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Overview

Berea is the most receptive audience; Athens, one of the least. Europe provides both extremes.

Application: Paul becoming all things to all men, in order to win some.

A. 10-15, Berea

Like Iconium: these two are the least elaborated over the common pattern, and both elaborate it in the same way (an extended follow-up ministry).

Like Lystra: persecution comes from out-of-town Jews.

1. Initiation

- a) Paul does not hesitate to move on. Does not seek to force people to believe. Simply lays out the facts and deals with those who respond. Timothy, in remaining behind in Thess., is establishing the new believers.
- b) Next town: goes right into the Synagogue. Regular feature. He knows what business he is about, and goes right to it.

2. The Noble Bereans

- a) The fact: "more noble than those in Thessalonica."
 - 1) "Those" = "those Jews," of whom in Thess only "some" believed.
 - 2) "Noble." Lit., "well-born." In that society, birth counted for a great deal. But Luke is describing a different kind of nobility, one open to anyone regardless of social status.
- b) The definition:
 - 1) Readiness, willingness to listen. "Receive the word:" like the Samaritans 8:14 or Cornelius and his family 11:1. Opp. 13:46, putting the word of God away (*apotigemi*). We offer it; people can either welcome it into their attention or reject it. Nobility entails an openness to what is suggested; not being of a closed mind.
 - 2) Respecting the authority of Scripture. They tested what they learned by what they had already accepted as the Word of God.
 - 3) Failure on either count is serious; failure to receive makes it impossible for us ever to learn anything new; failure to examine renders us subject to the whims of false doctrine (and we see an example of this in Athens, the very next stop). The solution to false teaching is not censorship, but Berean nobility.
- c) The result: compare v.12 "many" with v.4 "some."

3. The Ignoble Thessalonians

Here, as in Lystra, persecution comes from out of town. Shows the intensity of people's opposition to the truth: not only do they want to remove the local irritant, but they oppose the ideology to the extent that they want to keep it from going anywhere.

4. The Ongoing Ministry

a) By now, Timothy has rejoined the party from Thess.

b) Tim. and Silas are left to continue work in Berea, while Paul moves on ahead to Athens.

B. 16-34, Athens (Setting)

1. 16a, Waiting.

This is the first city in which Paul begins alone, without other believers to support him. Note the urgency of his instruction in v.15 for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him ASAP. Missionary work is a team endeavor, not a solo effort.

a) Reasons:

1) The example of our Lord, who sent out his followers two by two, Mark 6:7 (the twelve) and Luke 10:1 (the seventy).

2) The principle: Gen. 2:18; Eccl. 4:9-12.

b) In spite of this, we have no record that they were able to remain with Paul in Athens for any length of time. The demands of the ministry press hard on the team; we are not the first to face conflicting demands for our time and attention.

1) 1 Thess. 3:1,2 shows that Timothy was sent back from Athens to Thess. to continue the follow-up there.

2) Acts 18:5 shows that Silas rejoins him in Corinth; was not with him when he left Athens (18:1). Perhaps was sent back to Berea or even Philippi.

2. 16b, Wrath

Paul's response to what he saw around him: his spirit is stirred, lit. "angered." This is what doesn't happen easily to love (1 Cor. 13:5, "is not easily provoked"). Cf. the Lord's reaction to the moneychangers in the temple.

Today, people tour Athens to see the great works of ancient art. But the eyes of culture are pagan eyes. To Paul, these great buildings and sculptures were tangible evidence of man's rebellion against God.

We cannot avoid "culture," and in fact can learn much from it, but must do so through the eyes of faith. Evaluate such things, as Paul did, from a Christian perspective.

a) E.g., my impression from visiting Rome this summer: "How are the mighty fallen." What the guidebooks present as the cream of classical culture, I saw as God's verdict on a culture that denied him, and a warning of what awaits our culture.

b) E.g., the reactions Anita and I had touring the Petrified Forest a few years ago: the devastation wrought by the Flood.

3. 17, Outreach

How Paul occupied himself while waiting: he lets no grass grow under his feet.

From here through the end of the chapter, we have three successive levels of focusing and amplification: all men -> pagans -> those with a serious interest in the faith he is explaining.

a) Activity: "disputing," reasoning. Different word than "teaching" (emphasizing the conveying of information from master to student), "preaching" (the role of a herald, announcing), or "evangelizing" (emphasizes the content, the good news). This term emphasizes the reasoning involved, either an explicit discussion or a discourse that raises and addresses various objections.

Application: It's not out of order to engage the mind in evangelism!

b) Addressees and Venues:

1) Jews and proselytes in the Synagogue, seeking the point of contact as elsewhere.

2) Anyone who happens along (*paratugxanontas*) in the market. AV "met" is too deliberate. The market in the Greek city was like the gate of the semitic city, the focal point of trade and government. Cf. the U of M Diag. The great schools of the Stoics and Epicureans met in or near the market. Paul sought out a likely place to engage people, who in this case would be by and large pagans.

Application: Take advantage of God's accidents! "Chance acquaintances" are often engineered by God, and may be of more importance in the light of eternity than the elaborate plans we have made for ourselves.

4. 18, Focus in on the Pagans.

Of the two groups of addressees identified in v.17, this section focuses in on the pagans in the marketplace.

a) The auditors:

1) Epicurians: utilitarians. What matters is what works. If there is a god, he doesn't matter.

2) Stoics: pantheists; rigid idealists. Pharisaical orientation (and in fact with semitic connections).

3) *Application:* the same kinds of opposition that we face today!

b) Their reactions

- 1) Some (perhaps the Epicurians) reject him out of hand as a "babbler," lit. "seed-picker," originally a bird that scavenges whatever random seeds it can, then of someone who picks up scraps in the market, either literally or (as here) metaphorically: someone with no firm philosophical credentials, but who has picked up a few flashy ideas here and there and seeks to present them as though he really knew something. Thus this is a term of condescending contempt.
 - 2) Others (maybe the Stoics) think that "Jesus" and "anastasis" (resurrection) are the names of new gods that he is proposing; a serious matter, since each city flourished under the care of its patron deities, and to proclaim new deities was treason against the city (for which very cause Socrates had been executed here five centuries before).
 - 3) *Application*: Shows two forms of objection that we can receive to the gospel: mockery and principled opposition.
5. 19-21, focus further on the Stoics (or at least the second question)
This formal query is an extension of the second position in v.18, and as such may have been promoted by the Stoics. Examine the message itself and its results next time.
- a) 19a, The setting: the Areopagus is the city assembly. It originally met on Mars Hill (whence the AV interpretation of the phrase in v.22), but by this time convened mostly in the marketplace. This is a preliminary hearing around the question of whether Paul is indeed introducing gods.
 - b) 19b-20, The question: Could we please have further statement of these ideas that you're propounding?
 - c) 21, The characterization: much like many university communities today. All people care about is satisfying curiosity for the sake of curiosity; no sense of pragmatism. (Which is probably why the Romans managed to overtake them.)

Summary

Paul's principle is to be all things to all men, 1 Cor. 9:19-23. Now that he is in Europe, Luke records how he adopts his approach to the Greek mind.

Psalm: 72:1-8, O God, Thy Judgments Give the King.

Analysis

- A. 10-15, Berea
 1. 10 Oi(de\ a)delfoi\ eu)qe/ws dia\ nukto\s e)ce/pemyan to/n te Pau^lon kai\ to\n Sila^n ei)s Be/roian,

2. oi(/tines parageno/menoi ei)s th\n sunagwgh\n tw^n)Ioudai/wn a)ph/|esan.
3. 11 ou(^toi de\ h)^san eu)gene/steroi tw^n e)n Qessaloni/kh|,
4. oi(/tines e)de/canto to\n lo/gon meta\ pa/shs proqumi/as,
5. kaq' h(me/ran a)nakri/nontes ta\s grafa\s ei) e)/xoi tau^ta ou(/tws.
pres ptc of concomitant action; cf. Acts 19:9, Burton M&T p.55.
6. 12 polloi\ me\n ou)^n e)c au)tw^n e)pi/steusan, kai\ tw^n (Ellhni/dwn gunaikw^n tw^n eu)sxhmo/nwn kai\ a)ndrw^n ou)k o)li/goi.
7. temporal p
 - a) time: AQ p
 - 1) AQ f: 13 (Ws de\ e)/gnwsan oi(a)po\ th^s Qessaloni/khs)Ioudai^oi o(/ti
 - 2) AQ: kai\ e)n th^| Beroi/a| kathgge/lh u(po\ tou^ Pau/lou o(lo/gos tou^ qeou^,
 - b) text: h)^lqon ka)kei^ saleu/ontes tou\s o)/xlous.
Who troubles whom?
 - 1) *Accusations: the apostles are accused of*
a> *anastatow, 17:6, cf. 21:38*
b> *ektarasso, 16:20*
 - 2) *Actions: the Jews do the following:*
a> *saleuw, 17:13*
b> *tarasso, 17:8 [,13 Cr]*
c> *qorubew, 17:5*
d> *parotrunw, 13:50*
e> *epegeirw, 13:50, 14:2*
f> *katefisthmi, 18:12*
8. 14 eu)qe/ws de\ to/te to\n Pau^lon e)cape/steilan oi(a)delfoi\ poreu/esqai e(/ws e)pi\ th\n qa/lassan:
9. u(pe/meina/n te o(/ te Sila^s kai\ o(Timo/qeos e)kei^.
10. 15 oi(de\ kaqista/nontes to\n Pau^lon h)/gagon e(/ws)Aqhnw^h,
11. quote p
 - a) quote f: kai\ labo/ntes e)ntolh\n pro\s to\n Sila^h kai\ to\n Timo/qeon i(/na
 - b) quote: w(s ta/xista e)/lqwsin pro\s au)to\n
12. e)ch/|esan.

B. 16-34, Athens

1. 16 setting: compound p: Paul's spiritual turmoil.
 - a) time: 16)En de\ tai^s)Aqh/nais e)kdexome/nou au)tou\s tou^ Pau/lou,
 - b) text: parwcu/neto to\ pneu^ma au)tou^ e)n au)tw^|
 - c) reason: gewrou^ntos katei/dwlon ou)^san th\n po/lin.
2. contrast -- modes of presentation (*men ... de*)
Actually, specialization and amplification.
 - a) General description of his interactions with both Jew and Greek
17 diele/geto me\n ou)^n e)n th^| sunagwgh^| toi^s)Ioudai/ois kai\ toi^s sebome/nois kai\ e)n th^| a)gora^| kata\ pa^san h(me/ran pro\s tou\s paratugxa/nontas.

- b) 18, Focus in on the marketplace discussions with gentiles.
- 1) 18 tine\s de\ kai\ tw^n)Epikourei/wn kai\ Stoi+kw^n filoso/fwn sune/ballon au)tw^|,
 - 2) quote p
 - a> quote f: kai/ tines e)/legon,
 - b> quote: Ti/ a)\n qe/loi o(spermolo/gos ou(^tos le/gein;
 - 3) reason p
 - a> text: quote p
 - 1> quote f: oi(de/,
 - 2> quote: Ce/nwn daimoni/wn dokei^ kataggeleu\s ei)^nai:
 - b> reason: o(/ti to\n)Ihsou^n kai\ th\n a)na/stasin eu)hgge/i/zeto.

c) 19-34, Focus in on the Stoic's Question

- 1) 19-21, Their focused question
 - a> 19 e)pilabo/menoi/ te au)tou^ e)pi\ to\n)/Areion Pa/gon h)/gagon,
 - b> explanation p
 - 1> text: quote p
 - a: quote f: le/gontes,
 - b: quote:
 - 1: Duna/meqa gnw^nai ti/s h(kainh\ au(/th h(u(po\ sou^ laloume/nh didaxh/;
 - 2: 20 ceni/zonta ga/r tina ei)sfe/reis ei)s ta\s a)koa\s h(mw^n:
 - 3: boulo/meqa ou)^n gnw^nai ti/na qe/lei tau^ta ei)^nai.
 - 2> explanation: 21)Aqhnaioi de\ pa/ntes kai\ oi(e)pidhmou^ntes ce/noi ei)s ou)de\n e(/teron hu)kai/roun h)\ le/gein ti h)\ a)kou/ein ti kaino/teron.
- 2) 22-31, Paul's Response [next study]
- 3) 32-34, Response [next study]