

“NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL”

Acts 17:32-34

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INTRODUCTION

Much ink has been spilled over Paul’s sermon in Athens before the Areopagus.

- 1) Some question the authenticity of the sermon altogether, saying either that it is a total fabrication, or else that Luke himself wrote it based on a tradition that Paul had been in Athens and that an Areopagite was saved. **However to take such a position borders on lunacy.**
- 2) Others of a more conservative bent question whether Paul preached the Gospel here at all—since there is no direct mention here of the Cross. Moreover, when Paul went to Corinth following this, he seemed somewhat apprehensive and tentative and seemed to lack confidence, apparently shaken by his lack of success at Athens. Therefore, he realized his mistake in trying to be too philosophical in his preaching to the Athenians and determined never again to stray from the pure and simple preaching of the Cross of Christ—**See I Cor. 2:1-5.**
- 3) As plausible as this scenario may seem, **I cannot buy into this position.**
 - Paul never digressed from the pure and simple Gospel; however, according to his own claim, he became “all things to all men.” To the Jews as a Jew, to the Greeks as a Greek. He became all things to all men in order that he might save some (I Cor. 9:20-23).
 - His statement in I Cor. 2 meant that he would continue to follow the procedure with them that he had always followed everywhere. Despite their fondness for human wisdom, success, outward display, expression of human importance, Paul would simply preach the Gospel of the cross of Christ and Christ’s weakness and death—but also His victorious victory in the following resurrection.
 - The very fact that: 1) Paul preached the resurrection in 17:31 shows that he preached the crucifixion. 2) We do not have all of the words used by Paul in his sermon. 3) The fact that people believed and were saved (v. 34) shows that Paul had preached the substitutionary death—in what else could they believe?

In this short passage we see **three kinds of responses to the preaching of the Gospel:**

- 1) Those who Sneer
- 2) Those who put off making a decision
- 3) Those who believed

You must believe the Gospel and Join with believers in the local church.

- I. THOSE WHO SNEER AT THE GOSPEL (32)
 - A. The Cause of the Response—The Doctrine of the Resurrection
 - B. The Implication of the Response—Superiority of Greek wisdom, and the “foolishness” of the Gospel to their ears. It is the response of human pride and egotism. **This kind of response has kept many a person from being saved and has resulted in many going to hell!**
- II. THOSE WHO PUT OFF MAKING A DECISION (32)
 - A. Who were these people?

- B. What was the level of their sincerity?
- Some say very serious about their desire—future tense “shall hear”, and “also again” sounds like a definite plan.
 - However, though some may have been sincere in their desire to learn more, **we all know how quickly such desire wanes once the initial enthusiasm dies out!**
 - For many this was undoubtedly a merely polite “put off”; an attempt to bring the issue to a close with no real desire to pursue truth further.
 - **Human apathy and indifference is the predominant human response to the Gospel.**
- C. If Paul really thought that there was serious intention to learn more, would he have so calmly “gone out of their midst” (v. 33) and made no attempt to reconvene? Also, would he have so soon left Athens and gone on to Corinth (18:1)?

III. THOSE WHO BELIEVED (34)

- A. They “joined” Paul—“clung to, glued to”; a permanent and serious commitment
- This same verb is used for a man leaving father and mother and “cleaving” to his wife (Mt. 19:5)
 - For permanently “cleaving” to the **good** (Rom. 12:5)
 - For joining oneself to the Lord (like a spouse)—instead of to a harlot (I Cor. 6:16-17)
 - Also for “joining permanently with Christians (5:13; 9:26)
- B. They “believed”—biblical faith in the finished atonement of Christ on the Cross and as risen from Death!
- C. There were some significant persons:
- 1) Dionysius the Areopagite
 - This was a **significant coup for the Gospel of Jesus Christ!**
 - Compare the salvation of Joseph of Arimathea—Mt. 27:57-60—a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin.
 - In later church tradition he was said to be the first Pastor (Bishop) of Athens.
 - 2) Damaris (Damalis—“heifer”; cf. Dorcas—“gazelle”—chapter 9)
 - Since the place of women at Athens was not as significant as in Macedonia, the mere mention of her here shows her importance—esp. beside the Areopagite!
 - 3) Others with them—at least **two more**, and likely several others.
- D. No mention of a church at Athens
- E. There is no mention of Paul ever returning to Athens, or of any letter from him to them.

CONCLUSION

See **Rom. 1:16**—Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, “for it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one who believes.”

Some persons in Athens were not ashamed to **accept the Gospel, believe it, and become saved.**

Which group will you be part of?

Your choice will make the difference of your ETERNAL DESTINY.

YOU MUST BELIEVE THE GOSPEL AND JOIN WITH BELIEVERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH.