

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study of *Unstoppable Gospel*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

**The Point:** We can impact any culture with the gospel of Christ.

**Introduction:** In my twenty-one years as a pastor, I have dealt with people of various races and social classes. I've found some of the hardest cases are among the educated class. That doesn't mean there's anything wrong with education; on the contrary, I've known many highly educated people that devoutly serve Christ. However, as the comedian Jerry Clower used to say, "Some people are educated beyond their intelligence." They are convinced they are too intelligent or too sophisticated to believe in God or the Bible. They take pride in their great intellect, but in fact they are the biggest fools of all (Ps. 14:1).

In Acts 17, Paul faced an audience of the most brilliant scholars in the known world, and they proved to be one of his toughest audiences. Nevertheless, Paul didn't back down from the gospel, and neither should we.

## I. An unlikely situation.

- A. Paul had been left alone at Athens.
  1. He had been forced to flee from Berea.
    - a. He fled by sea, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind.
    - b. Silas and Timothy later joined him in Corinth (18:5).
  2. Athens was the cultural and intellectual center of the world.
    - a. It had produced some of history's greatest philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
    - b. In Paul's day, it still had a world-renowned university.
    - c. The city was "wholly given to idolatry." This was no exaggeration, since most of its architecture portrayed different Greek gods.
  3. Paul used his time wisely.
    - a. As his custom was, he went to the synagogues and told the Jews about Jesus.
    - b. The "devout persons" were Gentiles that believed in the true God, but did not fully accept the Law of Moses.
- B. He encountered some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.
  1. The Epicureans were founded by Epicurus.
    - a. They believed pleasure was the chief end in life.
    - b. They believed in gods, but they thought the gods were not concerned with the affairs of mortals.

- c. They denied any belief in life after death.
- 2. The Stoics were founded by Zeno.
  - a. They believed everything had a “divine spark”.
  - b. They sought to live by reason and they downplayed emotions.
- 3. Their reaction to Paul.
  - a. They called him a “babblers”. The word literally means “seed picker”. It referred to someone who picked up ideas here and there, but had no depth of understanding.
  - b. They accused him of proclaiming strange gods.

## II. An unusual declaration.

- A. Paul was taken to Mars Hill.
  - 1. Mars Hill and Areopagus (v. 19) were two names for the same place.
    - a. “Areopagus” means “hill of Ares”, who was the Greek god of war. Mars was the Roman god of war, so the Romans knew the place as Mars Hill.
    - b. Scholars debate whether the word “Areopagus” refers to the actual hill or to the council of scholars that used to meet there. Paul clearly addressed the council, but whether he was on the actual hill is not clear in the text.
  - 2. Paul was not on trial, but the philosophers were interested in hearing what he had to say.
    - a. The Athenians were always interested in hearing new things.
    - b. Paul was telling them something they had never heard before, so he had caught their interest.
- B. He told them about “The Unknown God”.
  - 1. Paul told the Athenians that were “too superstitious”.
    - a. Some translations say “very religious”. The word in the Greek is an ambiguous one, and Paul probably chose it carefully.
    - b. Altars to “unknown” gods were quite common in Athens. They took care not to neglect any gods, even the ones they did not know.
      - If you’ve ever been to Arlington Cemetery, you probably visited the Tomb of the Unknowns. It serves as a memorial to soldiers who died in war, but who were never identified. Just as we pay tribute to unknown soldiers, the Athenians paid tribute to unknown gods. They didn’t want to miss any of them.
  - 2. There was indeed a God of which the Athenians were unaware, and that was the God Paul worshiped and proclaimed, the only true God.

## III. An unmistakable invitation.

- A. Paul noted their “ignorance”.
  - 1. To the Greeks, ignorance was a terrible sin.
    - a. This was the second time Paul called attention to their ignorance. The first was in verse 23.
    - b. God had tolerated their ignorance of Him up to this time, but now their ignorance was no excuse.
  - 2. God was now commanding them to repent.
    - a. “All men” – That refers to all people, regardless of race, nationality, or social status.
    - b. “Everywhere” – He is not just the God of Israel, but the whole world.

- B. Paul also told them about the coming judgment.
  - 1. God will judge the world in righteousness.
    - a. His righteousness is perfect, so His judgments are correct.
    - b. We fall short of His standards (Romans 3:23).
  - 2. God will judge people “by that man” – i.e., Jesus Christ.
    - a. Jesus proved He was the incarnate Son of God when He rose from the dead.
    - b. Those who reject Him will have no one to blame but themselves.

**Conclusion:** The gospel of Jesus Christ will always be an offense to those that do not believe (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Certainly we should try to build bridges of communication to reach the lost, but if we think we can somehow make the gospel palatable to them, we are kidding ourselves. When people make such attempts, they inevitably compromise the message. Paul did not back away from the gospel at Mars Hill. Many people mocked him, but a few believed (v. 34). The power lies not in our rhetoric or our clever arguments, but in the gospel itself. Preach it unashamedly!

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