



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Acts 13 – 26 Sermon Series

Supports Session 7: Believe

Sermon Title: “Taking Our Culture Back” (Acts 17:16-31)

Connection to Session 7

Christians can engage the culture and claim it for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Introduction/Opening

The song made famous by Johnny Cash and written by Wayne Kemp, “One Piece at a Time,” talks about a plan that he hatched to sneak a part each day from his job at the auto factory. His goal was to have a car by the time he retired. But there were problems beyond the obvious:

The transmission was a '53 and the motor turned out to be a '73,
And when we tried to put in the bolts all the holes were gone.
So we drilled it out so that it would fit,
And with a little bit of help with an adapter kit,
We had that engine runnin' just like a song.

Now the headlight' was another sight,
We had two on the left and one on the right,
But when we pulled out the switch all three of 'em come on,
The back end looked kinda funny too,
But we put it together and when we got through,
Well, that's when we noticed that we only had one tail-fin.

Uh, what model is it? Well, it's a '49, '50, '51, '52, '53, '54, '55, '56, '57, '58, '59' automobile
It's a '60, '61, '62, '63, '64, '65, '66, '67, '68, '69, '70¹

People tend to put together a mixture of different ideas and make it their worldview. This is the case today, and this was the case in ancient Athens. They would make a quilt of ideas, taking one idea from one group along with something from another speaker, and then they would patch everything together to try to come up with a consistent worldview. But much like the car in this song, it doesn't work.

In fact, those who do this sort of thing may think they are creating a thing of beauty, when in fact they're actually creating the worst kind of work imaginable. It's a worldview that resembles something that looks more like Frankenstein's monster.

¹ <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Johnny-Cash/one-piece-at-a-time-1>

So how do we reach people in our culture? Paul gives us a good model for reaching people with the gospel.

Outline

1. Go where the people are (Acts 17:16-17)

- a. Go where they hang out.
 - i. Paul was waiting for Timothy and Silas to arrive in Athens. During his time there, he went where the people were.
 - ii. There were people in the synagogues. Paul routinely reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue.
 - iii. There were many groups of people in the marketplaces who were very different.
 1. Epicureans believed in finding truth and purpose in life by living it up. They sought to experience a great amount of pleasure, even being lost in it and enjoying many of the material things around them.
 2. Stoics desired to avoid either pleasure or pain, so they ran to reason.
 - a. They were often unemotional and detached.
 - b. They stressed the importance of reason as the principle that was inherent in the structuring of the universe and by which men ought to live.²
 3. These were two opposite philosophies that would be seen in the marketplaces of Athens in Paul's day.
 - iv. Paul went to both the synagogue and the marketplace to seek opportunities for conversation.
 - v. Simply put, he went where the people hung out. Some were in the synagogues, and some were in the marketplace.

2. Go and engage (Acts 17:18-21)

- a. Don't stand on the outside.
 - i. Paul wasn't just an outside observer; he engaged in conversations.
 - ii. The philosophers didn't like what Paul had to say, calling him an idle babbling.
 - iii. In calling Paul a babbling, they used "a word translated 'ignorant show-off' in CSB; the term originally used here literally means a "seed picker."³
- b. Engage in truth and love.
 - i. Yet the philosophers wanted to hear more (vv. 19-21).
 - ii. There is something special about speaking the truth in love. Those who are open to hearing the gospel will feel drawn to hearing more about Jesus Christ.
 - iii. The very fact that they asked Paul to tell them more shows us today how important it is to engage people in a conversation.

3. Correct falsehoods with the Word. (Acts 17:22-31)

- a. Understand the culture.

² I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 300.

³ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 250.

- i. Paul was able to quote Greek poets and understand Greek thought (1 Cor. 9:19-23).
 - ii. It's important to understand our culture while not being so drawn in that we lose the message of Jesus Christ.
- b. Run to the Gospel.
 - i. Paul took the arguments found in Greek culture and pointed them to Jesus Christ.
 - 1. “God now commands all people everywhere to repent” (v. 30).
 - 2. “He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (v. 31).
 - ii. Paul found common ground of their cultural experiences and shared the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - iii. And what was their response? Some rejected him. Others wanted to hear more. But some joined him and believed.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, Paul gives us a good example here: Go where the people are, then share. Don't be afraid of engaging with people: relate to them and point them to the God of all truth.

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