

## **The World's Attitude Toward the Gospel** **Acts 17:15-21**

### **Introduction:**

1. We learned this morning that there is currently a satanic world system that is established and operating on this earth right now. The Bible many times simply calls it "*the world.*"
  - It is decidedly anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-morality, and at its foundation are pride, rebelliousness, lawlessness, and immorality.
2. We also learned that Christians are **in** the world but we are not **of** the world.
3. The spirit of the world once worked in all of us (Ephesians 2:2). But the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior, we received another Spirit – the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:12
4. As believers, we now belong to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, yet we are physically on the earth in the midst of Satan's kingdom. We no longer belong to this evil world system, yet we must function and live in it every day.
5. How can we do that victoriously? We learned that we must possess the proper attitudes towards this world system. If we are to make an impact on lives in this world system, it will take the right attitudes.
6. The apostle Paul traveled to the great city of Athens, and we saw Paul's attitudes.
  - Initially, Paul was provoked to righteous anger. vs. 16
  - Next, Paul spoke against the paganism of the world. vs. 17
  - Finally, Paul boldly proclaimed Jesus as the only answer to this evil world. vs. 18
7. But when we possess these attitudes, what kind of a response can we expect to receive from those that are ensnared in Satan's world system? How do those in Satan's world system respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ? We learn here in our text.

### **First, we see total complacency. vs. 17**

1. As his manner was, Paul went into the Jewish synagogue and began his ministry there. He showed them from God's Word who Jesus Christ was and is.
2. What was the result? Absolutely nothing! There is no record of any reaction, either positive or negative. Have you ever tried to share Christ with somebody and they just didn't care? It simply went in one ear and out the other?
3. This is so common among people today. Satan's world system has lulled people to sleep, and when the gospel is shared they listen, yawn, and walk away. Satan has convinced people to only worry about the here and now.
4. He has convinced people to give no thought to death, eternity, heaven, or hell. You've heard the expression, "*Eat, drink, and be merry.*" Satan says, "Live it up, have a good time, and do whatever feels good and give no thought to your eternal soul."

- A sobering illustration of this is the rich man in Luke 16:19-21. What was Jesus trying to teach through this illustration? Look at verse 15. When people live for the here and now and give no thought to eternity, they make a grave mistake.
5. The sad part is that the complacency of the world has rubbed off on the church of today. Believers go through the motions, but there is no zeal or fervency to serve God and impact lives. Romans 13:11; cf. Titus 2:14

### **Second, we see man-made philosophies. vs. 18**

1. As we have already pointed out, Athens was known as one of the great intellectual capitals of the world. The most celebrated philosophers were associated with Athens.
2. Yet for all its worldly achievements, Athens remained ignorant of the true God and woefully ignorant of God's truth. Philosophy had no answers as to how to change a sinful human heart.
3. A couple of the philosophies of the day are mentioned:
  - Epicureans – This was a major school of philosophy in Athens. It taught that indulgence is the key to life and that pleasure is the highest good. It was devoted to sensual pleasures and luxury, especially good food. It denied the existence of life after death.
  - Stoics – This was a school of philosophy that taught that man should live according to nature and be unmoved by joy or grief, pleasure or pain. In other words, indifference was the key to life.
4. People still respond to the gospel with their man-made philosophies today. Have you ever tried to give a person the truth of God and he responds, "I know what the Bible says, but I believe...." What he is basically saying is, "I don't believe God's Word, but rather I have my **own** philosophy." Colossians 2:8
5. You can certainly have your own philosophy, but that isn't going to work out too well when you die and judgment day arrives. cf. vs. 30-31; 1 Corinthians 1:18-20

### **Third, we see ridicule. vs. 18**

1. They call Paul a "*babbling*" in verse 18. This was an expression of contempt, inferring that Paul had some kind of lunatic religion that could not possibly appeal to intelligent men.
2. Notice, they also ridicule the doctrine of Jesus and His resurrection. They said, "*He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods...*"
3. These people are supposed to be intellectuals, yet they ridicule the greatest event and truth of all time – Christ's death and His glorious resurrection.
4. This is still so typical of unregenerate minds today. In universities and colleges across America, the gospel message of Christ is scorned and ridiculed. Spiritually ignorant men pose to be wise and intellectual men. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
  - The idea of the text in 1 Corinthians 1 is that when a man refuses to humble himself before God and submit to God's truth, he appears very wise, confident, and self-assured to the world. He is "*his own man.*"

- This man is not one of the called of God because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble! This prideful man's heart remains closed because of his own pride; he clings to his own egotistical beliefs.
5. Those that are noble and wise in the world's eyes have so much more to lose by coming to Christ, therefore it is rare that a person that is of worldly fame will come to Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:18-20

**Fourth, we see a desire for learning, but a rejecting of the truth. vs. 21**

1. According to verse 21, the Athenians would just stand around in the market place, talking and jabbering, hoping to learn something new.
2. Yet these people were ignorant of the true God and of spiritual truth, and could not grasp it. It reminds me of 2 Timothy 3:7, "*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*"
3. This is so incredibly true of our culture in America. Never has there been a time when education and academic degrees were so lauded, yet so few come to the knowledge of the truth.
4. This is why it is so important that, like Paul, we continue to faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ without compromise, and that we continue to do missionary work and plant churches all over America and around the world.
5. The church is said to be "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" 1 Timothy 3:15
6. There are people that will accept God's truth (vs. 34), but "*how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?*" Romans 10:14