



Gospel Encounters in Acts

Paul's Contextualized Approach

Acts 17:16-34

Context: Church Growth, Persecution and Gospel Spread.

- Church in Jerusalem is founded as a result of Holy Spirit being poured out on the apostles and Peter's bold proclamation (Acts 2).
- The church community is marked by fidelity to each other and the Word of God (Acts 2:42-47)
- The church is persecuted by the Jews in Jerusalem and dispersed throughout the region. (Acts 6:7 – 8:4)
- Paul is converted by Jesus on the road to Damascus and is chosen as an instrument of the Lord to spread the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16)
- Peter is given a vision from God that shows God intention to bring Gentiles into the church (Acts 10:34-35)
- Paul is on his second missionary journey. He has been forced out of Thessalonica and then Berea by the Jews then ended up in Athens while waiting for Silas and Timothy. (Acts 17:1-16)

Our Call and Posture of Evangelism

- **2 Timothy 4:5** *"But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*
- **1 Thessalonians 1:6-8** *"You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word during great affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place the news of your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to say anything."*
- **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** *"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

Evangelism Done Well

- **1 Corinthians 9:19-27** *“Though I am free of obligation to anyone, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), to win those under the law. 21 To those without the law I became like one without the law (though I am not outside the law of God but am under the law of Christ), to win those without the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way as to take the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games trains with strict discipline. They do it for a crown that is perishable, but we do it for a crown that is imperishable. 26 Therefore I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight like I am beating the air. 27 No, I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”*
 - **Question:** What does this teach us about how we should approach gospel ministry?
 - **Question:** What could Paul mean when he says “so...I myself will not be disqualified”?
 - **Question:** What does training and discipline in holiness have to do with sharing the gospel message?

Humility in Evangelism Applied: Understanding Culture

- **Worldview:** a person’s way of thinking about and understanding life, which depends on their beliefs and attitudes” (Oxford Dictionary)
- **Culture:** The customary beliefs, social forms, attitudes, values, and characteristics shared by people in a place and/or time. (Miriam-Webster)
- Worldview builds culture, and culture propagates a worldview.
- Christians are people who have a worldview that is centered on the truth of God and are called to be a part of a new culture within the church.
 - **Philippians 3:20** *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”*

Contextualization: What is it?

- **Definition:** “The dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation.” (Dean Flemming)
- **My Definition:** Making the gospel as understandable as possible by removing as many barriers as possible without compromising truth or personal integrity.
- **Purpose:** “Contextualization seeks to enable the people of God to live out the gospel in obedience to Christ within their own cultures and circumstances.”

Activity: Read Acts 17:16-34 (Group Discussion)

- Who was Paul talking to in this passage?
- How did Paul start his Gospel proclamation?
- How did Paul connect with his audience?
- How did Paul point people to Christ?

What can we learn from Paul's contextual approach?

I. His Attitude

- He was compassionate.
 - **V. 16** – *“his spirit was provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols”*
 - Paul cared deeply about the people of this city. They were clearly groping around in spiritual darkness and his spirit was disturbed.
- He was a listener and a learner.
 - **V. 17-18** – *“he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him.”*
 - Reasoning and conversing involves being a listener. To have a conversation means for both parties to be given opportunity for input.
- He showed humility in granting their request to speak on their terms.
 - **V. 19** “And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?”
- He affirms what he can.
 - **V. 22** “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.”
 - He does not compromise any truth by saying this, but instead affirms that he sees their pursuit of truth in their worldview.
 - **How could this be helpful in gospel conversations with people?**

II. His Approach

- He builds on common ground.
 - **V. 23** *“For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.”*
 - He takes something that is familiar to them and explains the truth of God through it.

- He lays the groundwork of God's redemptive narrative.
 - **V. 24-26** *"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation"*
 - He establishes God as the creator God who is all-powerful in determining all things even the lives of his listeners. He brings them under the hand of God.
 - It is not only Paul's "god", God is the God of everyone.
- He acknowledges aspects of truth within their culture.
 - **V. 28** *"for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'"*
 - He calls to attention something that is true from their own culture to bridge to God's truth.
- He is bold in reasoning in truth.
 - **V. 29** *"Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."*
 - He corrects their wrong thinking and beliefs through reasoning.
 - He walks with them logically to the truth.

III. His Answer

- He calls for repentance
 - **V. 30** *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent"*
 - This implies that there has been sin.
 - Paul was not afraid of pointing out sin and calling people to turn away from it.
- His answer is Christ
 - **V. 31** *"because he has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead."*
 - He holds Christ up as the resurrected righteous judge that they would have to stand before on judgment day if they do not repent.

VI. Applications for Our Evangelism

- Ask God to stir your spirit with compassion for the lost.
- Be a listener and learner. In order to contextualize we have to learn something about the person/people.
- Affirm as much as the truth allows you to. Build people up in the truth instead of tear them down.
- Meet people where they are. Jesus was the best at contextualizing. He came to us in the flesh.
- If you find common ground, build on it. It will connect the dots of truth that they do have to the dots of the gospel.
- Be sure to paint God as the God of the universe, over all people, not just something you believe in.
- Reason your way to the gospel based on things that they already agree with.
- Be sure always to give the answer of Christ.