

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 15

Day One: Receiving or Resisting the Word of God?

Cultures change along with the times as one generation passes to another, but people remain divided over the truth of Jesus Christ. Some have their hearts softened and prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the gospel; still others remain hardened and resistant to Him. The details in our chapters this week allow us to see differing responses to the same gospel message, while at the same time helping us to better understand what we can expect from our own world as we witness for Christ. We see too, the advantage of ministry teams working alongside one another to achieve maximum results.

Take notice this week of Paul's method for sharing the *good news* and see if you can apply the same techniques. When you use the resources of scripture along with your personal testimony and example, the Holy Spirit is able to use you to transform the lives of others with whom you come in contact. As you take care to guard your relationship to God, He takes care of the responses of others to your message, guarding your reputation in the process.

Read Acts 17–18.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impressions.

Memory verse: Acts 17:29–30 Write out the verse; repeat it daily to commit it to memory.

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

It was Paul's custom to witness in larger cities targeting Jewish synagogues and then expect the new converts to evangelize the smaller outlying towns. Paul realized that not only was Thessalonica the capital of Macedonia, it was a "free city," a hub with harbor access at the crossroads of important trade routes.

While laboring during the week days in his tentmaking trade, Paul spend three Sabbaths ministering in the synagogues speaking to the Jews and Gentiles who were seeking God.

1. Notice the key words in Acts 17:2–3, depicting Paul's approach to the people:
 - *Reasoned*—dialogued through questions and answers
 - *Explaining*—by opening the scriptures
 - *Demonstrating*—to prove through evidence
 - Why would it be necessary to use different means to reach his audience?

2. What act of God did Paul continually emphasize about Christ through his preaching that is the bedrock of Christianity? (See Acts 1:21–22; 2:32; 3:15.)

3. At the end of three weeks of preaching, what were the results? v. 4

4. What did those who were not persuaded set out to do? Were they successful? Vv. 5–9

Those who have turned the world upside down have come here too (v. 6). Apparently the reputation of these early evangelists had preceded them! Sensational news has a way of doing that—shaking people to their core.

5. Personal: Recall a time when the news of your acceptance of Christ as your Savior caused others to feel the impact of your decision. Briefly share the results.

Day Two: Ministering at Berea

Read Acts 17:10–15 for review.

Under cover of darkness, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to the region of Berea where they would enjoy a rich time of ministry before the troublemakers from Thessalonica would again stir up the people, forcing Paul onward toward Athens. Much to Paul's surprise and relief, there in the synagogue of Berea he received a welcome from a group of people who would remain a model example to the Christian church for well over two thousand years.

1. Looking at verse 11, note the outstanding qualities of these Berean believers.

2. Because the Bereans were true students of the scriptures, what was the result of Paul's preaching there? v. 12

The passion and zeal these believers had for God's Word is exactly what pleases the heart of God. David the psalmist of Israel said, "I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your loving-kindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name. Why would David say such a thing? Because the Word of God—the *Bible*—reveals the God behind His name. All that is said and done *in His name* should be held up and tested by the Word—if it is inconsistent or contradictory to His Word, it is not sanctioned by Him. God puts a priority and value on His Word that His followers should esteem highly. In our *Deeper Discoveries* this week we will look at some verses from God's Word that hopefully will motivate us to daily search the scriptures—for in them we find Him.

Deeper Discoveries ~

Look up the verses below with the purpose of discovering a lesson and a personal application. Look for what God is saying in His Word; what He means by it; and how it applies to you. Put your application in the form of a question. The first example is done for you.

Isaiah 1:18 Lesson: God wants my fellowship; to hear my thoughts and reasons. He offers me forgiveness—the red stain of my sins to be made as white as snow.

Application: Do I realize that God wants my fellowship more than I want His? That He is willing to cleanse me of my sin to make it possible? Am I responding daily to His invitation?

2 Timothy 2:15 Lesson: _____

Application: _____

2 Timothy 3:16–17 Lesson: _____

Application: _____

1 Peter 3:15 Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Hebrews 4:12 Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Which of the above verses ministers to your heart today? Why?

Day Three: Ministering at Athens and Corinth

Read Acts 17:16–34; and 18:1–11 for review.

When Paul arrived in Athens, he found a city more populated with idols than with people! With plenty of deities to choose from, the saying was that in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man. This ancient city is comparable to our modern New York or Paris or Rome. It was filled with intellectuals offering a plethora of different ideas. Paul now found himself alone rather than with a ministry team (having left Timothy and Silas to care for the churches in Macedonia).

1. How did Paul react to the environment around him? v. 16
2. How did he attempt to share the truth with them? v. 17

There were two main groups of philosophers: the Epicurean school of believers denied there was a life after death and followed the rule that leisure and pleasure—freedom from pain, anxiety, and passion was the means to the highest end. The Stoics touted dependence upon oneself for every need, emphasizing reason and common sense in dealing with life’s problems while living in harmony with all of nature. Paul certainly had his work cut out for him!

3. Did these philosophers take him seriously? What did they label him? v. 18

Paul seemed to move fairly quickly from the marketplace ministry to a bigger arena and more formal court of the Areopagus with his message. To the Athenians, Paul had some very strange ideas; and the divided opinions over his message got the attention of the council overseeing the affairs of the city. His words in the larger venue would make the difference between being able to exercise his freedom to preach or to be censored and silenced permanently.

4. Contrast the Athenians’ pastime in v. 21 with that of the Bereans’ in v. 11.
5. As Paul passed through the city, what did he notice that became the opportunity and anchor for his message? Vv. 22–23
6. What follows in Vv. 24–28, is the heartbeat of Paul’s message. In your own words briefly state what Paul preached that day on Mars Hill.
 - v. 24: _____
 - v. 25: _____
 - v. 26: _____
 - v. 27: _____
 - v. 28: _____

7. Since we are His offspring, what are we believers *not* to think of God? v. 29
8. God may have overlooked such ignorance in times past, but what does He expect today? Why? Vv. 30–31
9. Personal: Paul’s spirit was stirred with a holy indignation when he saw a city given over to idols. But he was moved with compassion for the people; compelled to reason with all who would listen. Have *you* ever faced down evil as Paul did? Did you act on it?

There was a minimum of miles between Athens and Corinth, yet they couldn’t have been more different. Athens boasted economic status and historical significance with a population of nearly ten thousand. Corinth was relatively new but close to two hundred thousand resided there making it the largest city in Greece at the time. Corinth was well known for its commerce but even more so for its sexual immorality. The city was given to idol worship of many kinds with special emphasis on Aphrodite, her temple, and one thousand sacred prostitutes. Paul would preach there for an extended period, dealing with his greatest challenge to date.

Paul succeeded in finding a home with Aquila and Priscilla, working alongside them during the week and every Sabbath he turned his focus to persuading the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Since Luke makes a distinction between Vv. 4–5, we can infer that once Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul gave himself over to preaching.

Look Closer ~

What does Luke tell us about the dramatic results from the opposition in Acts 18:6?

- a. Who were those that believed? Vv. 7–8

In the midst of spiritual prosperity we know there had to be spiritual attacks. Paul had come to Corinth in weakness, fear and in much trembling (1 Corinthians 2:3). We can assume the enemy was targeting him when he received a vision from the Lord to strengthen him.

- b. What did the Lord say to encourage Paul? What does the length of Paul’s stay (approximately a year and a half) say about his confidence in the Lord?
- c. Personal: How does your confidence in God stack up to Paul’s? Do you trust Him to protect you and defend your witness? Please explain.

*You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints;
He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Psalm 97:10*

Day Four:

The Value of Ministry Teamwork

It is in the city of Corinth where Paul encounters Aquila, a Jew, and his wife Priscilla, driven there by the order of Claudius commanding all Jews to leave Rome. There were riots breaking out between unbelieving Jews against the Christian Jews similar to those in Jerusalem, Ephesus and Thessalonica. It is possible that Aquila and Priscilla were already believers when they came to Corinth in search of a new home. Paul arrived as did this couple, lacking in funds and the means of making a living. We recall that in Paul's early days he learned the skill of tentmaking and, when informed of a couple who recently arrived from Rome who were also tentmakers, they joined together as a team. Paul went to work for them, living in their home and forging a bond that would benefit them all economically and serve them well in the ministry.

Aquila and Priscilla were probably not aware of the impact of their friendship upon Paul and the believers, but as they willingly opened their hearts and their home, many lives were touched. Imagine the hours spent in the cutting and stitching of their work together, all the while exchanging words of encouragement and sharing the scriptures. Their workplace became a sanctuary and their new city a mission field. Paul would later say of this couple in one of his letters: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:3–5a).

Use this passage in Romans 16:3–5a, along with Acts 18 to answer the following:

1. What character qualities can you determine about Aquila and Priscilla?

2. What observations can you make about their spiritual gifts and how they used them?

3. How did this couple influence Apollos' testimony for the Lord?

4. To what length were they willing to go on Paul's behalf?

5. What insight do you gain about the power of friendship in working as a ministry team?

6. Personal: Look closely at Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. How does this passage beautifully depict the blessing of participating in a ministry team? What are you able to give right now to help forge a ministry team for Christ? Will you keep this a matter of prayer?

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Think about how you may have been resistant to God's Word. What did you receive this week from your study that will help you correct that resistance?

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
