

**Superman?  
Clark Kent?  
Or something  
else?:**

**Acts 17:16-34**  
**Sharing the gospel in a  
Postmodern, Pluralistic**

# Study Preparation

Three biblical themes which guide our witness:

- Separation
  - Deut. 18:9-14; I John 2:15-17; Matt. 6:24
- Transformation
  - 2 Cor. 5:17; Romans 12:2
  - Matthew 6:10; and 6:33
- Conservation
  - Acts 17:16-34

# Study Preparation

- There is also a cultural reality which guides our witness:
  - Deeper than Actions
  - Deeper than Beliefs
  - Deeper than Values
- We must be willing to cross cultural boundaries if we are seeking to make the Gospel message understood.

The cultural onion:

# Athens and America

- Our post-modern society is similar in many ways to the Athens Paul visited.

*“**16**While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.”*

- What are the idols we face in our culture?

# The Temple and the Marketplace

*“17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.”*

- What is the significance of Paul going not only to the synagogue but also to the marketplace?
- We are called to proclaim the Gospel not only to people who are like us (religiously or culturally) but also to those who do not yet believe in Christ

# The Crowd's Response

*“18A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, ‘What is this babbler trying to say?’ Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ”*

- What can we learn from the crowd's response?

# Strange Ideas To Our Ears

*“**19**Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20**You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.’ **21**(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)”*

- How might our concepts/beliefs be seen as strange today?

# You Are Very “Religious”

*“22Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ”*

- Would you say that our society today is religious? Spiritual? What is the difference?

# An Unknown God

*“23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”*

- What can we learn from Paul’s usage of “the Unknown god” reference?

# Paul's Proclamation

*“24’The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.*

# Paul's Proclamation

*“27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.” 29 Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ’”*

# Paul's Proclamation

*“30In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

- Why does Paul mention Christ as a judge? As resurrected?

# The Reaction

*“**32**When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." **33**At that, Paul left the Council. **34**A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.”*

- How is Paul’s message of God received by the Athenians?
- What does this remind us to remember?

# Application

- Context is very important.
- God has given us every opportunity to share.

*“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” 1*

Peter 3:15

# Separation

- God is either personal or impersonal, either moral or amoral, truth is either absolute or relative.
- Even if it may be considered impolite we must speak the truth in love.

## **BUT. . .**

- If this theme is not complemented and balanced we run the risk of isolating ourselves from legitimate involvement with, and witness to, our culture.

# Transformation:

- Not only are we transformed, but we are to be instruments of transformation in the world  
(2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:2 Matthew 6:10)
- We must be careful not to create a “secular” mentality – there is no such thing.  
(Colossians 3:17, I Corinthians 10:31)
- We are called, first of all, to seek the kingdom of God and to proclaim that truth, not seek to expose the kingdom of evil.

# Conservation

- ALL truth is God's truth, even though men may have couched it in the most incredible lies.
- We are called to follow Paul's example of separating ourselves from worldly thinking, insisting that the Gospel is based on God revelation, not human craftiness.

(Colossians 2:8-10, Romans 3:4)

- We are called to engage people with the truth as we point them to the light

(Matthew 10:16)