

MOVE ON, STAY PUT: ACTS 17.10-18.17



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Move On, Stay Put: Acts 17.10-18.17
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Introduction to Acts 17.10-18.17

Paul continues his ministry in Greece, moving from Thessalonica and Berea to Athens, then Corinth. In Corinth, the Lord instructs him to stay put, even though the people don't seem to be all that hospitable, and he has to work a "day job" to support his ministry.

Still, the work continues: preach the Good News, organize churches, train leaders, make disciples, put up with the threats and raging of unbelievers, win more people to the Lord. The ongoing work of Christ is being replicated in Greece, just as previously in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Asia Minor.

Paul is a powerful witness, an excellent communicator, and a dedicated church planter. He shows us how to think about finding our place in the ongoing work of Christ in our day.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view each one by [*clicking here*](#).

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 The Word in Their Wake

Read and meditate on Acts 17.10-15.

From 1 Thessalonians 1, we know that Paul's ministry there was effective, even though the situation made it impossible for them to remain. They moved on to Berea and, as was their wont, went to the synagogue as soon as possible. There, as we have seen, they would have argued from the Old Testament Scriptures the teaching about Christ in support of their claims.

For reflection

1. Paul's dogged use of the Scriptures drove his hearers to search the Word for themselves, which was a good result. The living Word of God is powerful to penetrate the souls of men, but they must be exposed to it for this to happen (Heb. 4.12). How does Paul's example counsel us in using the Word in the work of evangelism?
2. Jot down what you consider to be the most important Scripture references you should include in your witness for Christ:
3. We note Luke's reference to Paul's preaching as "the word of God." Indeed it was, as his epistles would be also, and not simply because they were consistent with what the Scriptures teach. Paul was inspired by the Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 3.4, 5), and Luke seemed to recognize this even before Paul began writing. This is a hallmark of Paul's ministry. He was *grounded* in the Word, made sure to *use all of it* (Acts 20.27), and was careful not to *go beyond* what was written there in any of his teaching (cf. 1 Cor. 4.6). How does his example counsel us as we bear witness to Christ in our Personal Mission Fields?
4. Paul reminded Timothy that the Word of God was sufficient to prepare them for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17), especially the work of proclaiming the Gospel, building the Church, and advancing the Kingdom of God – the ongoing work of Christ. Can we expect to be effective in our witness for Christ – lived and spoken – if we are not also students of the Word, like Timothy? Explain.
5. Whenever we ignore or go beyond that Word in any aspect of this ongoing work, we stray from the path marked out by Paul and his colleagues. How confident are you that everything in your church is being done according to the Word of God? In what ways does your church encourage its members to become steeped in the Scriptures?

Summary

Luke emphasizes the centrality of Scripture in the ongoing work of Christ for all aspects of life in the Kingdom of Christ. We cannot expect to fulfill our Kingdom-and-glory callings apart from reliance on and obedience to the Word of God. Can you see any ways your own approach to the Scriptures – reading, learning, and applying – can be improved?

Closing Prayer

Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—
Your salvation according to Your word.

So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me,
For I trust in Your word.
And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
For I have hoped in Your ordinances.
So shall I keep Your law continually,
Forever and ever.
And I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your precepts.
I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings,
And will not be ashamed.
And I will delight myself in Your commandments,
Which I love.

Psalm 119.41-47

2 Seeker of Men

Read and reflect on Acts 17.16-21.

Jesus said that He came to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19.10). Paul was of that same bent, because he, like each of us, was sent to the world as Jesus was sent (Jn. 20.21). So we're not surprised to find him seeking lost people in all the places he might expect to find them.

For reflection

1. Paul "reasoned in the synagogue" and "in the marketplace." What does all this *reasoning* suggest about Paul's approach to sharing the Gospel?
2. In the marketplace Paul might expect to find philosophers from various schools of thought, milling about with their students, debating one another, expounding on this, that, or the other. Here he would have had plenty of opportunities to continue the ongoing work of Christ. In your community, where do people gather to talk and enjoy one another's company? Should your church be seeking the lost in such places? Explain.
3. Paul's "spirit was provoked within him" over the rampant idolatry of the city, but he did not let that keep him from his work. He *might* have concluded that the Athenians, given all their idols and worldly philosophers, would not be interested in the Gospel. Instead, *he went straight to them*, reasoning and preaching as often as opportunities allowed. What idols are people clinging to in our day? Does this trouble you at all?
4. The Athenians could only barely get the gist of his message – "this new doctrine" – so they sent a delegation to invite him to make a formal presentation at the Areopagus. This is certainly a more courteous welcome than he'd received in any Greek city thus far! In a public forum, Paul would be able to expound his teaching and answer questions. How might your church create such a forum in your community?
5. Paul is sometimes faulted for his efforts in Athens. Some suggest that he relied too much on reason and philosophical discussion, rather than on the Word, and that's why the results were so meager. Nonsense. Paul was "preaching Jesus and the resurrection;" and, while he would adapt his message for the worldview of his hearers, in no way did Paul stray from the plain teaching of God's Word, as we shall see. What is your approach to "seeking" the lost people in your life? How about your church?

Summary

Paul is seeking to launch the ongoing work of Christ among the Athenians, but he's bringing the light of truth into a very dense fog of rationalistic philosophy and pagan religion. After his visit there, we will hear no more about Athens and the few hearers converted by Paul's ministry. Do you think Christians today are daunted in their witness by the dense fog of our secular and unbelieving age? How can believers encourage one another to seek the lost?

Closing Prayer

Your hands have made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
Those who fear You will be glad when they see me,
Because I have hoped in Your word.
I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right,
And *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort,
According to Your word to Your servant.

Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live;
For Your law *is* my delight.
Let the proud be ashamed,
For they treated me wrongfully with falsehood;
But I will meditate on Your precepts.
Let those who fear You turn to me,
Those who know Your testimonies.
Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes,
That I may not be ashamed.

Psalm 119.73-80

3 The Word to the Worldly

Read and meditate on Acts 17.22-28.

Luke gives us what is probably a condensed version of Paul's message to the members of the Areopagus. We can learn a great deal from this message about doing the work of evangelism in our own Personal Mission Fields.

For reflection

1. Let's note the following: First, Paul commended the *sincerity* of their religion. They may have been *wrong*, but they were *sincere*. Paul gave them credit as worshipers and did not chide them for their idolatry, which would only have put them on the defensive and been the end of his address. If we want to earn the right to be heard by others, we must first take the time to *hear them* concerning their own beliefs. How does this transfer into your work as a witness for the Lord?
2. Second, Paul was impressed by their humility in acknowledging an "unknown" deity. They didn't pretend to have *all* the answers, and were open and honest about the limits of what they understood about life and the world. Paul saw in this admitted ignorance his entry point for the Gospel. Every worldview offers a variety of entry points for engaging conversation about the Gospel. We just need to learn how to identify those and to follow the Spirit as He leads us smoothly from their worldview to ours. What entry points for the Gospel might you expect to discover in the lives or worldviews of people in your Personal Mission Field?
3. Next, Paul used quotes from two Greek poets to support his teaching; however, the foundation of his message is Scripture. Every worldview provides resources for pointing *beyond* that worldview to the teaching of Scripture. Again, we can learn to recognize and use these to our advantage in sharing the Gospel. For example, unbelievers agree that love is an important affection, beauty is a good thing, and every person has some measure of dignity – *even though those beliefs are not inherent in a secular, evolutionary worldview!* How might you use one or another of those entry points to connect with an unbelieving friend or co-worker?
4. Paul led his hearers to compare the majesty and greatness of the God of Scripture – the God Who needs nothing from men – to the gods of the Greeks, which needed to be placated by temples, devotions, and other accoutrements, lest they should fail to deliver whatever goods the worshipers hoped for from them. It is folly, Paul explained, to think that so great a God as the One Who exists beyond human knowing should be dependent upon anything from mere mortals. We can see the heads bobbing, eyes squinting, and chins being rubbed as Paul led his audience to consider an overlooked contradiction (one among many) in their worldview. Do you think that we sometimes give the impression that our God is "too small" (cf. J. B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small*)? Explain.
5. Paul did not need to condemn or denounce the Athenian worldview in order to expose its folly and undermine its reliability. He was a faithful preacher of the Word of God, but he was also a skilled communicator. Paul was not trying to use philosophy to *reason* his audience into accepting Jesus. He was preaching the Word to these worldly Athenians and using their own philosophy to show that the wisest among them had intuited the truth, to some extent, of what Paul proclaimed. He hoped to show them that the Gospel brought corrective, clarity, and fulfillment to what was

wrong and lacking in their worldviews. Most unbelievers we know hold to a materialistic view of life: the good life consists of good things and good times. How might you both affirm this idea and show an unbelieving friend the folly of living this way?

Summary

Paul engaged the Athenians on their turf. He affirmed as much as he could of their worldviews, and he graciously pointed out inconsistencies they perhaps had overlooked. He used whatever resources he could from their view of life and the world, yet he drove his argument straight to Christ, the resurrection, the coming judgment, and repentance and faith. What can you learn from Paul in Athens to improve your own witness for the Lord?

Closing Prayer

Your testimonies are wonderful;
Therefore my soul keeps them.
The entrance of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple.
I opened my mouth and panted,
For I longed for Your commandments.
Look upon me and be merciful to me,
As Your custom *is* toward those who love Your name.
Direct my steps by Your word,
And let no iniquity have dominion over me.
Redeem me from the oppression of man,
That I may keep Your precepts.
Make Your face shine upon Your servant,
And teach me Your statutes.

Psalm 119.129-135

4 The Worldly Respond to the Word

Read and meditate on Acts 17.29-34.

Taking off from a quote by the poet Aratus, Paul questioned the reasonableness of men imagining God as a Being Who could be reduced to some concrete, portable form. If we are God's offspring, then when we think about God we should think about a Being rather like ourselves, only more amazing – like Jesus, for example.

For reflection

1. People are the fruit of the imagination of God. God is not the product of the imagination of people, or, if such a god is, it is a false god. Paul was trying to lead the Athenians to see that their best thoughts about truth and the good life could not compare with what God has revealed about these in Jesus Christ. Their gods were fashioned out of their own best ideas; the true God has made Himself known in Jesus. How should we apply Paul's approach in our witness for the Lord?
2. In the imagination of God, He has ordained the salvation of benighted men by coming in *their own image* to proclaim the day of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We note in Paul's address both the promise of redemption, the offer of salvation, the warning of judgment, and the call to repentance. Nothing philosophical here; this is pure *theology*. Should we be reluctant to share our theology with the unbelievers in our Personal Mission Field? Explain.
4. Paul's tactic in Athens is criticized by some because he didn't get the results he realized elsewhere. Quite the contrary. Some believe. Some are piqued and would like to talk further. And some are just angry. We've seen this everywhere Paul has gone. Paul was as effective in Athens as he had been anywhere else, because like everywhere else, he stayed true to the Word of the Gospel. How can you tell when your witness for the Lord is effective?
5. The ongoing work of Christ consists of replacing the sinful, benighted, unbelieving worldview of the Lie with the truth that is in Jesus Christ. To do this we have to analyze and disassemble one worldview, and carefully explain and assemble another in its place. Reason and persuasion are the proper tools here, dressed in the garb of preaching. How much does the idea of *worldview* factor into the disciple-making process in your church? Ask a church leader about this.

Summary

Paul took the time to learn the worldview of the Athenians, then he used that worldview as a platform on which to frame out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Some believed, some scoffed, and some wanted to hear more. Many believers are reluctant to share the Gospel because they don't think people will believe. Look at Paul's example again, and the results of his preaching. How should we be *encouraged* in our witness by Paul's experience in Athens?

Closing Prayer

Consider my affliction and deliver me,
For I do not forget Your law.
Plead my cause and redeem me;
Revive me according to Your word.

Salvation *is* far from the wicked,
For they do not seek Your statutes.
Great *are* Your tender mercies, O LORD;
Revive me according to Your judgments.
Many *are* my persecutors and my enemies,
Yet I do not turn from Your testimonies.
I see the treacherous, and am disgusted,
Because they do not keep Your word.
Consider how I love Your precepts;
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness.
The entirety of Your word *is* truth,
And every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.

Psalm 119.153-160

5 Settling In

Read and meditate on Acts 18.1-4.

Paul's strategy in Corinth marks a change in his approach to launching the ongoing work of Christ. Why did he decide to settle in with this man and woman and take up a "day job" in Corinth? Well, we don't know, but we can assume the Lord was leading him in this way, as will be confirmed in v. 9.

For reflection

1. Paul's ministry plans were neither so specific nor concrete that he could not be open to the Lord's leading in some new way. Paul was not run out of town in Athens, but he decided he'd done as much there as possible or necessary. We've seen Paul launch the ongoing work of Christ in Athens. Now the church there needed to be established. Based on what we've seen thus far in Acts, what steps would you have taken to ensure the ongoing work of Christ became established in Athens?
2. It's possible that Aquila and Priscilla were already believers at this point, given what we learn about the depths of their knowledge of the Gospel in vv. 24ff, as well as the readiness with which they received Paul. Had they been in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost? Or learned the Good News while they were still in Rome from someone who had been there? We don't know. What do we learn from their example about encouraging one another in the ongoing work of Christ?
3. Paul took up with them and joined in their trade to support his work. This will continue for 18 months, as we shall see – leaving Paul not a little peeved with the Corinthians, who never seem to have understood about their obligation to the one who was ministering God's Word to them (cf. 1 Cor. 9.1-12). Paul continued his ministry in the synagogue week by week, and wherever else he could meet people to reason with them, as time permitted. He would have been known as a tent-maker first and an evangelist second. How do you suppose this must have affected Paul's work as a tent-maker?
4. Tent-making – bi-vocational work – is a reasonable option for Christians called to the ministry of the Word. But the fact that a man has other employment to support him in his ministry, does not excuse those who are served by his labors from helping to meet his needs (Gal. 6.6). And the fact that others may have their work in some full-time occupation other than proclaiming the Word, does not excuse them from being witnesses for the Lord (Acts 1.8). How should we envision the combined witness of church members and church leaders as it comes to expression in a local community? Is this what you see in your church?
5. Besides material support, what is the responsibility of a congregation of God's people in caring for those who minister the Word to them? What is a pastor's responsibility in leading His people into the ongoing work of the Kingdom?

Summary

Paul was committed to doing whatever was necessary to keep the ongoing work of Christ going forward (1 Cor. 9.19-23). The Corinthians – except for Priscilla and Aquila – were neither very

hospitable nor generous where Paul was concerned. From his two epistles, we learn that they seem to have been a fairly immature, contentious, and self-centered lot. But God kept Paul there for 18 months (v. 11). Why? How should this encourage us in our witness for the Lord?

Closing Prayer

Let my cry come before You, O LORD;
Give me understanding according to Your word.
Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word.
My lips shall utter praise,
For You teach me Your statutes.
My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments *are* righteousness.
Let Your hand become my help,
For I have chosen Your precepts.
I long for Your salvation, O LORD,
And Your law *is* my delight.
Let my soul live, and it shall praise You;
And let Your judgments help me.

Psalm 119.169-175

6 Fear Not, Stay Put, Speak On, Don't Worry

Read and meditate on Acts 18.5-11.

We note that to the Jews Paul preached “Christ” then “Jesus” (the order of words in v. 5 in the Greek). Whereas to Gentiles the message was often the reverse. Think about it: Why does this make sense?

For reflection

1. The Jews in Corinth seem to have been a bit more cosmopolitan than in Macedonia. They opposed and reviled Paul, but they didn't whip up a mob and try to stone him. Yet, Paul knew when he'd worn out his welcome, but he didn't leave off teaching at the synagogue without a word of warning about the judgment of God. We saw this same word in his message in Athens. Should our presentation of the Gospel include such a warning? Explain.
2. Paul determined to go among the Gentiles in Corinth, and to symbolize that, he changed his residence. This is not a slight to Aquila and Priscilla; rather, it was a tactical move. Having left the synagogue, where he had a platform for speaking about Jesus, he needed a place to meet with Gentiles, and so the home of a Gentile was a more likely venue than that of a Jewish couple. Should churches teach their members to use their homes as a venue for evangelizing neighbors? Why or why not?
3. This was a good move – conveniently enough – since Justus' home was right next to the synagogue (in case any Jews might want to wander in). Paul's leaving shocked the Jewish community, as the ruler – the chief elder – of their synagogue, Crispus, went with him, perhaps provoking the further action by the Jews, which we will see in the next section. Paul and Silas arrived from Macedonia, and the team was back to full strength. What can you find out about Corinth in Paul's day which might help you understand why the Lord wanted him to stay there for so long?
4. Many began coming to faith. Paul doubtless began to worry about this, given what had happened in previous cities. But the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul to encourage him in his ministry, which would continue in Corinth for a year and a half. Note the Lord's commands: Fear not, stay put, speak on, don't worry. How would you translate these instructions into your own witness in your Personal Mission Field? What promise can you claim (v. 10a) to help you in carrying out these instructions (cf. Matt. 28.20)?
5. Jesus had many in Corinth who were among His people – elect, but not yet saved. He willed that Paul should continue seeking those lost sheep until a sufficient number had been gathered to ensure the ongoing work of Christ in Corinth was not only launched, but established. How did Jesus know those people not yet saved would in fact become His people? Is it possible that Jesus has “many people” who belong to Him in your community? Is your church as active in seeking them as Paul was in Corinth?

Summary

The Church in Corinth became an important base for the ongoing work of Christ through the end of the first century. The work there was not easy, and the Corinthians never saw fit to “pick up the

tab” for Paul’s ministry (Silas and Timothy actually brought support from the Philippians to support Paul). The Church in Corinth seems to have been comprised of many house churches (1 Cor. 1.11; 16.15), but these apparently contended with one another for primacy of place – squabbling and strutting like babes in Christ (1 Cor. 1, 3). But Paul didn’t give up on them. Instead, he worked to strengthen and renew these churches, even while he was in Ephesus, and to enlist them in the ongoing work of Christ worldwide. What can we learn from this about local churches and what we should expect of them as signs and outposts of the Kingdom?

Closing Prayer

Those who trust in the LORD

Are like Mount Zion,

Which cannot be moved, *but* abides forever.

As the mountains surround Jerusalem,

So the LORD surrounds His people

From this time forth and forever.

For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest

On the land allotted to the righteous,

Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.

Do good, O LORD, to *those who are* good,

And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.

Psalm 125.1-4

7 Trouble in Corinth

Read and meditate on Acts 18.12-17.

It was inevitable. Those who could not silence Paul by reason or reviling, decided to turn the implements of government against him. We see this same thing in every age, even our own. We should not be surprised when people try to force Christians either to conform or be silent, by appealing to civil government.

For reflection

1. Paul was about to explain himself, but Gallio, being a true Roman magistrate, recognized at once that this was a *religious* matter and should be settled within the *religious* community. The Romans allowed all kinds of religions in the Empire, as long as devotion to the Emperor was maintained. Each of those religions had their own forms of discipline, and Gallio wasn't about to get involved. How do you see this government fulfilling its appointed role as a servant of God for good (Rom. 13.1-5)?
2. The problem, of course, was that the Jews' form of discipline had failed. Paul had excommunicated himself, but he was still preaching *right next door!* If we are faithful and active in our witness for Christ, can we ever hope to avoid having some people be upset with us? Explain.
3. So, since the Jews couldn't get at Paul, why not beat up one of their own? Why Sosthenes? Doubtless because he was leaning toward, if not already supporting, Paul in his mission. That beating seems only to have strengthened Sosthenes in his faith and determination to follow Paul (1 Cor. 1.1). How should believers respond to threats, intimidation, or other kinds of bullying, so that we, like Sosthenes, grow stronger in our faith through such trials?
4. The opponents of the Gospel could not win the day by reason. Christians should be impervious to slander and reviling ("sticks and stones" and so on). We should not be surprised when the enemies of the Gospel will try to force us into silence through the actions of civil magistrates. But if we're faithful in praying for our rulers, might we not short-circuit that tactic before it comes into play (1 Tim. 2.1-8), or find the strength to persevere in spite of it? Explain.
5. What guidelines for praying for civil authorities does Paul commend in 1 Timothy 2.1-8? Do you pray for those who are in political power over us? Does your church teach and lead you to pray for civil magistrates?

Summary

We might want to say that Paul was not a very good witness for the Lord, since everywhere he went, folks got upset and tried to bash him. But this is exactly what Jesus told us to expect, and Paul certainly understood this would be the case. Nevertheless, he was undeterred in his witness, and the Lord took care of him, even though He allowed him to suffer indignities, hostility, and even violence. How can we as believers, together with our churches, prepare for such a witness – and such responses – within our own communities?

Closing Prayer

The fool has said in his heart,
“*There is no God.*”
They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity;
There is none who does good.
God looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are *any* who understand, who seek God.
Every one of them has turned aside;
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one.
Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge,
Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread,
And do not call upon God?
There they are in great fear
Where no fear was,
For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you;
You have put *them* to shame,
Because God has despised them.
Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

Psalm 53

For reflection or discussion

1. So far in Acts 1-17 we have seen the ongoing work of Christ *launched* into various communities and regions. Typically, what does this *launch* phase involve?
2. Making disciples requires *established* communities of faith. From what we've seen in Acts thus far, what are the characteristics that tell us that a church has become *established* as a sign and outpost of the Kingdom?
3. Paul's second missionary journey is part of the *dispersion* and *replication* process of the ongoing work of Christ. How many different components or facets are involved in this part of that work?
4. What next steps for working your Personal Mission Field can you derive from our study of this section of Acts?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 17.10-18.17?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word to the way we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our reading and meditations in this week's studies? How has He shown Himself to you more clearly? How can this help you live more consistently *for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from Acts 17.10-18.17 to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.