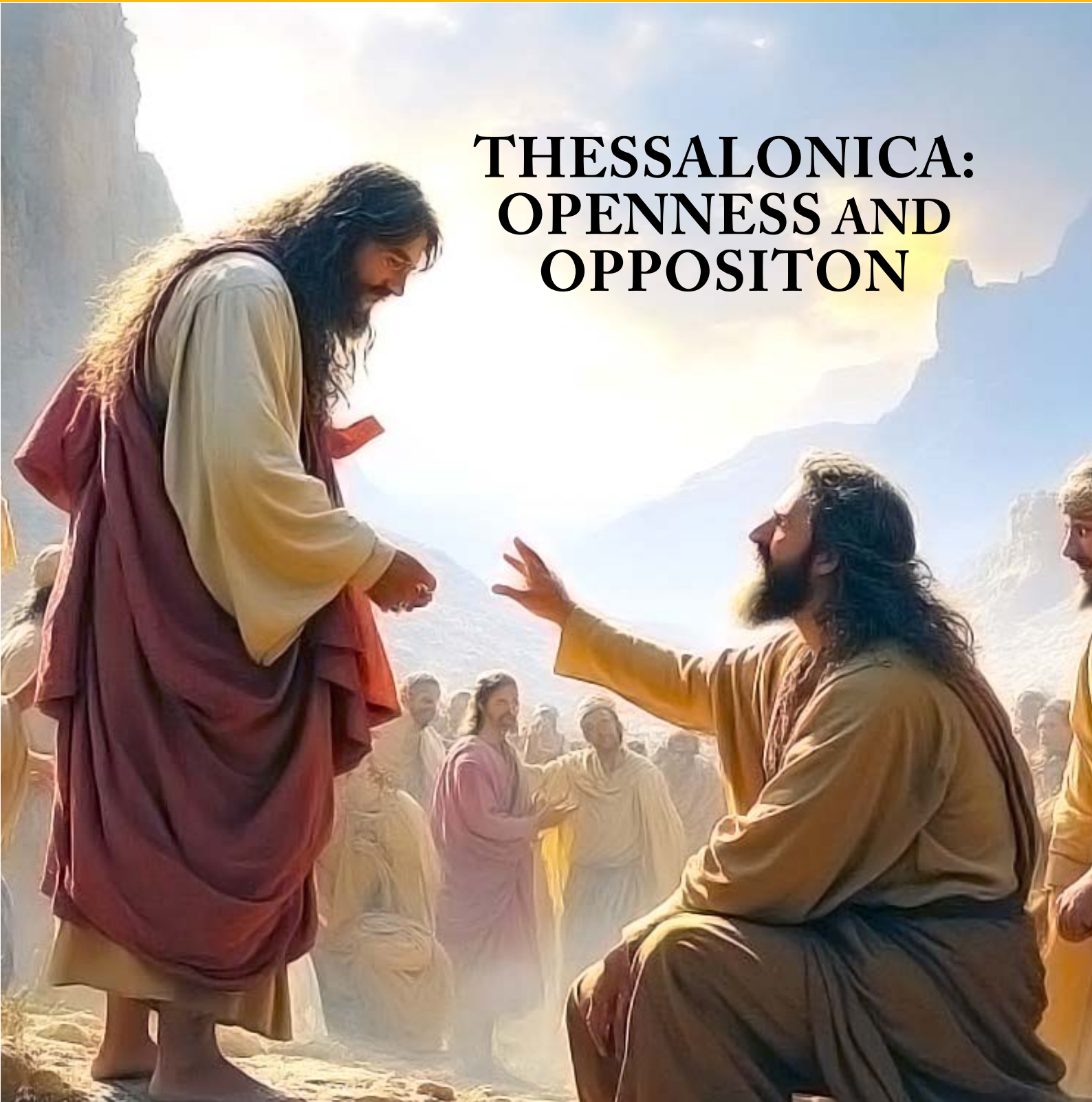


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## THESSALONICA: OPENNESS AND OPPOSITON





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# A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION

## What is the Christian response to persecution?

This question has great importance for us today. In the past few years and especially since the new government, India's Christian community has experienced more and more persecution than any other time since independence 1947.

Increasingly, we hear stories of Christians beaten, raped, and killed. Militants burn churches, raid prayer meetings, and destroy Bibles. Even in the state of Kerala where Christians comprise 20% of the population, Hindu radicals attack Christians in a kind of "ethnic cleansing". Propaganda machines foment hatred, accusing Christians of "lies", "destroying civilization" and following a man (Jesus Christ) who "is a dark force risen from the lowest depths of human nature."

In the meantime, the police watch, do nothing, and even join the hatemongers. State and central governments often offer no help and make no statements to calm hatred and restore order.

As followers of Jesus Christ, how are we to regard all of this? I believe we should look to the Bible, to the writings of a man who both persecuted and endured great persecution. I speak of the Apostle Paul. He writes to the Thessalonians, who suffered Persecution because of their faith:

"Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of You among the churches of God for Your Perseverance and faith in the midst of all your Persecutions and afflictions which You endure. This is a Plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering."

Note that Paul commends the Thessalonians in their sufferings. They have been tested in the fire for their faith. The sense of Paul's words is that all who love the Lord will experience this testing. Scars of affliction are the hallmark of our humanity as Christians on this earth. Affliction is a result of our weakness and the uncertainty of life in a world not fully surrendered to God.

In a sinful world, People defy their Creator. They worship other gods and give themselves to godless Passions. Persecution is what rebels do to those who give up their rebellion against God.

The Thessalonians were only one group of people to whom Paul ministered. At different times, with Silas and Timothy, Paul shared the gospel with Jews and Greeks. Wherever they went, large numbers turned from idols to serve the true and living God.

But everywhere, they faced fierce opposition. Why should this happen? They did not Plot to overthrow the Roman government. They did not incite civil disobedience or rebellion against any authorities. They only became excited over their new relationship with God. They had discovered His holiness, His Presence and His power.

They had experienced His glory. They saw their Passions and desires change. They found the truth, and now they wanted to share it with neighbors, friends, and the whole world. They had only one Problem.

Their changed lives through Christ only revealed that others lived in error. This made others furious. What had believers done to offend? Nothing. It was the nature of Christianity that offended. The holiness of God had "rubbed off" onto them, and the rebels couldn't stand it. They did only what rebels do: they struck back. If they could not strike God, they would at least strike His children. Persecution became a sign that God was at work.

Persecution has always been the lot of God's People. Daniel the prophet faced Persecution because he took a stand to worship the true God. He believed God would be faithful to him, and he did not worry what would happen.

As a Young man, the Babylonians took him and his friends captives. They lost everything dear to them, including their names. But God blessed Daniel and gave him favor with his captors, so that the king even wanted to make him a ruler in his kingdom. This aroused the anger and jealousy of others who knew that this was the direct result of his relationship with God. They tried to destroy his relationship with God, and when that failed, they tried to destroy him.

Daniel was a Pilgrim and a stranger in a strange land. In a way, so are we. Though Christians have been in India for more than 2,000 years, we are now told by some that we are not citizens in our own homeland. But let us not feel sorry for ourselves. In us, these people only see the work of God with whom they cannot or will not reconcile.

Persecution cost Stephen his life, but it also helped to spread the church far and wide - and even converted the man who over saw his execution. Even as his persecutors stoned him to death, Stephen saw a vision of Jesus Christ so powerful and glorious, that even his terrible suffering could not keep him from rejoicing then pitying his killers and pleading to God for their forgiveness. Stephen's experience reminds us that during our greatest trial, Christ will also give us a vision to help us bear our sufferings. Even if persecution leads to death, we will know not humiliating death but comfort, glorious reward, and spread of the gospel.

These examples of faithful meant each us that if we love Jesus Christ and live lives of faith, we WILL face persecution as certain as the sun rises and sets. But persecution only means that our lives reveal God's life in us to others. When we stand for a righteous cause as did these Daniel and Stephen, God enables us to transcend the fear of death. We may not find deliverance in this life, but we shall find deliverance in the next.

Because we bear His Spirit, we have eternal life. Persecution cannot destroy eternal life in Christ's church, cannot undo our relationship with God. Nothing can destroy Christ's church, including the worst that man can bring against it.

Indeed, persecution will do just the opposite. In our weakness, we will discover His strength. In our weakness, we will discover a new love for Him and for one another. In our weakness, we will see God work in great and marvelous ways beyond our expectation. In our weakness, God always makes new hearers for the gospel. That is why persecution has never destroyed the church.

A more modern victim of persecution was John Wesley, the English preacher. Wherever he went, he preached the gospel, and he became a daily target of rocks, eggs and tomatoes. But John Wesley so understood the connection between effective evangelism and persecution that he expected nothing less than abuse. In fact, when two or three days passed without an egg or insult thrown at him, he even feared that he was in sin, failing to reflect the life of Christ to others!

In spite of persecution, Wesley's faithful evangelism brought stunning revival to Christ's church in England and a massive harvest of souls, even among his persecutors, that changed English society for generations.

As India's Christians face persecution today, let us draw courage from those who have gone before us. We face hard times, but also the greatest opportunity that India has ever had to see the glory of Christ. Let us not seek persecution, but if it comes, let us bear it in His grace and victory.

As the old proverb says, "Whatever goes through the fire cannot be overcome by the heat of the sun."

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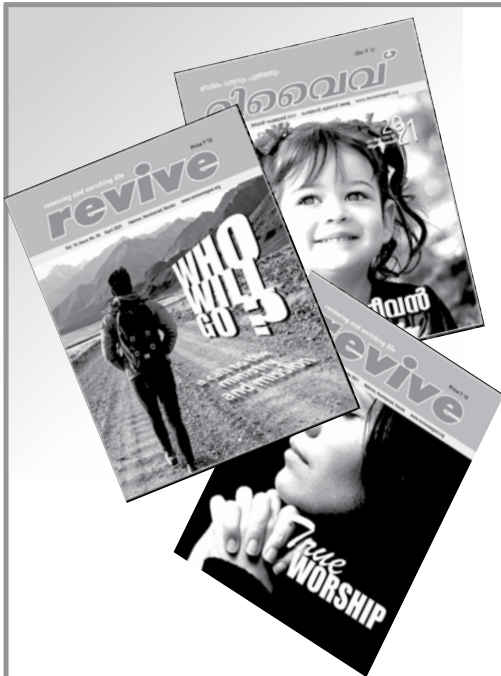
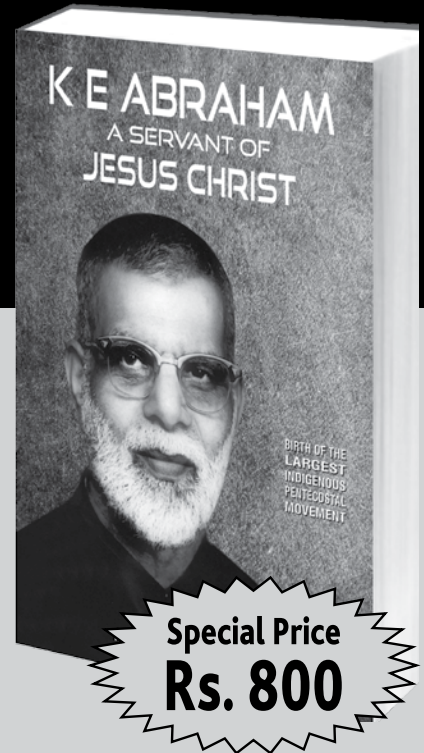
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Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

# POWERFUL GOSPEL

**Acts** chapter 17 describes Paul’s ministry in three cities and how some of the people in those cities responded to the Word of God.

Paul and Silas traveled one hundred miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. Apostle Paul used to preach in big cities and made it a strategic place for the work of the Lord. His strategy was for the believers in those cities to spread the gospel to the neighboring villages. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and a major center of business. The town though predominantly Greek was controlled by the Romans.

After three weeks of ministry, Paul saw many people come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But this brought opposition, and the Jews wanted to drag the missionaries before the city assembly.

Opposition is nothing new for Christians. Christianity flourished amid persecution and opposition. Even today so many people are attracted to the Gospel despite severe opposition. Countless people are attracted to the Gospel even in Arab nations. The world is unable to find a clear answer to this phenomenon and tries to explain it in various ways.

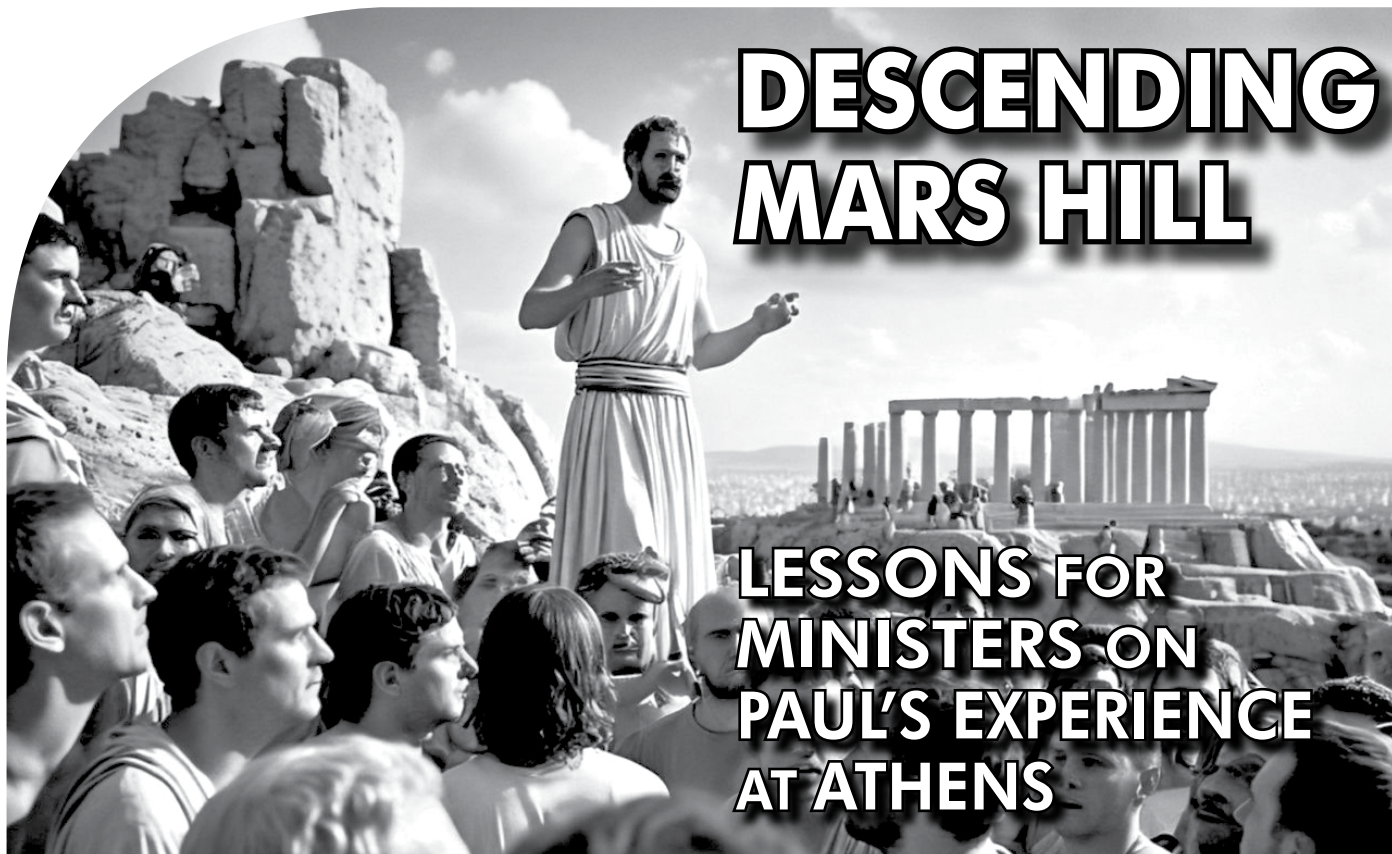
The answer is simple. *“There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

The only way of salvation is Jesus Christ. The interesting thing is that it is free because our Lord Jesus Christ paid the price on the Cross!

C. H. Spurgeon is quoted as saying that he was so sure of his salvation that he could grab onto a cornstalk and swing out over the fire of hell, look into the face of the devil, and sing, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine”. When the storms of life, the winds of trouble, and the sea of discomfort and emotional agony seem to overwhelm we have to say with the songwriter, “Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness ...” And the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin” ( 1 John 1:7)

When we share the truth there is opposition but the truth penetrates and permeates the hearts of people. We see it even today.

There is no salvation in any other. There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the lamb. ●



# DESCENDING MARS HILL

## LESSONS FOR MINISTERS ON PAUL'S EXPERIENCE AT ATHENS



**KRIS A. JACKSON, ThD**

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**Paul** and Silas' itinerant schedule was determined as much by their persecutions as by their charted plans. The first clause of Acts 17 has Paul preaching in Thessalonica then speedily departing with Silas because some of the Jews in the city created an uproar, saying, "These that have turned the world upside down have come here also" (vs 6). Actually, the two evangelists were turning the world right side up, not upside down, because a world gone in sin is a world gone insane. They moved their ministry to Berea and had good success then to Thessalonica, where the religionists stirred up more trouble (vs 13). This forced them to move their operation again. As a ship was being prepared, Paul was escorted to Athens, it was not a planned stop, but Paul would walk through whatever door the Lord would open, this time in the center of Grecian art and intellectualism.

What occurred there merits study because the evangelistic truths learned from Athens, Greece will also apply to Athens, Georgia, or any other city for that matter. Let's take a look at the city, the venue, the audience, the message, the reception and the lessons we can extract from the historical text. You may not have noticed but Paul's descent from Mars Hill wasn't quite like his ascent. I will not say that the Apostle failed in this gospel effort, but his descent was anything but joyous.

### THE CITY

Paul entered Athens in hope of reaching a greater mass of people because of the size of the Grecian population center. He was in a heathen metropolx that desperately needed Christ. "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (vs 16). His heart was burdened over the mythologies, superstitions and perversions of the city. Like Jeremiah, his eye affected his heart (Lamentations 3:51). He started sharing the gospel message with



the Jews in the synagogues, then common people in the marketplace, then in the debate halls of the philosophers (vs 17,18). He became all things to all men, that by all means he might win some to the Lord. At last, he was ushered to the Areopagus, the Hill of Ares, or “Mars Hill”, an outcropping of the Acropolis, 377 feet above the Agora marketplace, looked upon as the courtroom of the Gods.

### THE VENUE

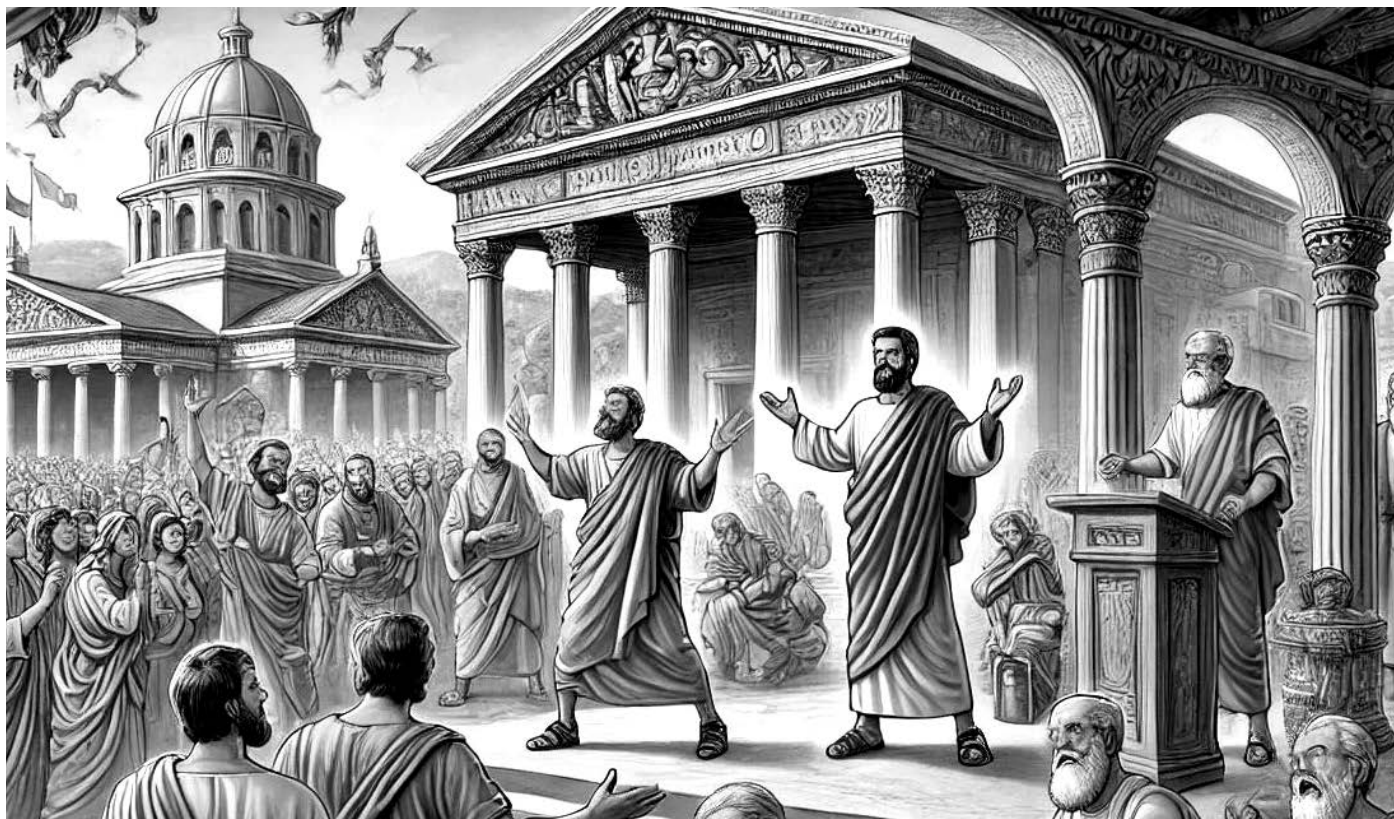
Grecian mythology says Ares was tried by the gods on Mars Hill for the murder of Poseidon’s son. I believe the location had once been dominated by actual Nephilim demigods thousands of years earlier. The evangelist must not fear to infiltrate Satan’s seats of power. Though many of the world’s great philosophers debated there during Paul’s day, the location was certainly a demonic stronghold. Paul went strategically for the jugular vein of Greek intellectualism and mysticism. Later he would face seats of religious and

“  
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 ”

political power in Jerusalem and Rome, but the target for the time being was Athens, the center of mystical and occultic principalities and powers.

### THE MESSAGE

“Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said...” (vs 22) A preacher that won’t stand for something will fall for anything. The gospel must be heralded. Paul began to speak articulately, positively, intelligently, and with intention. He had a methodology to counter their mythology, countering the logicians with logic, speaking of an altar to the Unknown God (vs 23). He said they “ignorantly” worshiped this God and went about to explain the true God who believers meet by faith in Jesus Christ rather than the futility of religious sacrifices, temples and the works of men’s hands.



Then he appealed to their humanity as all being “of one blood”, then their senses, that the Grecians might “feel after him”, and even to their own poets’ words that we are “the offspring of God” (vs 24-28). Paul was a Jew, but he was versed in Hellenistic culture. He concluded his reasoning with a plea for repentance, what we would term an altar call – “And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commands men everywhere to repent” (vs 30). Then he dialed up the heat, referring to the coming judgment for those who reject “that man” whom God had appointed.

By sheer hermeneutics this was Paul’s best sermon. It would have received the most YouTube clicks. But viewership is not the measure of success. I am not being critical here, but I do not see Jesus mentioned in his sermon. It appears that

“  
**Paul vowed a different approach in Corinth. He appeared fearful of falling flat on his face in the next Grecian city he visited, so he determined to preach Christ alone, simply, forcefully, authoritatively, rather than communicating logic and sophistication.**  
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Paul was attempting to prove spiritual matters to these spiritists, rather than just offering the simple gospel “which to the Greeks is foolishness”. It was an apologetically masterful message, spoken on the level of the audience hoping to persuade them in the direction of Jesus Christ. But the Mars Hill experiment was in many respects a failure.

We were never commanded nor intended to match wits with the world. The Stoics, Epicureans and seekers of some new thing, in our day, are only seeking amusement and entertainment. They may be philosophical, but they are not spiritual. I believe he should have told them about the change in his life after seeing Jesus in all His glory. Instead, he tempered the message to their liking, sounded smart, refused to look foolish in their presence, and left out both Jesus and the cross.

## THE RECEPTION

I believe this is the proper way to interpret this passage because Paul himself didn’t

think he did all that well either. The world may give a standing ovation but if the preacher knows he didn't strike a spiritual nerve, then the praise doesn't much matter. When the message concluded "some mocked, and others said, We will hear you again of this matter" (vs 32). Next verse, "Paul departed from among them". There was no reason to remain, no protracted meeting followed. However, or "howbeit" a few sided with Paul and believed, among whom were "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (vs 34). That Dionysius was an "Areopagite" suggests a man of great distinction, so Paul's fishing effort had snagged a big catch. But beyond those "few" we see no great shaking in Athens as had occurred in other cities where Paul preached.

## THE LESSON

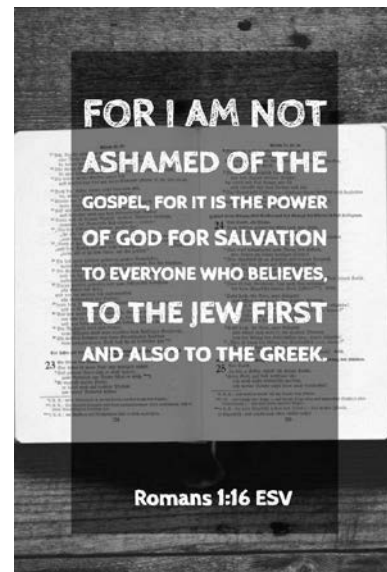
All we can do is present Jesus Christ and His gospel – the results must be left with God. Aiming for a big move of God in a big metroplex is a sensible project but reality doesn't always match our expectation. Paul's descent from Mars Hill was different than his ascent. We know from Luke's historical account that Paul went from Athens to Corinth, with his account recorded in a later letter – "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:1-3). Paul vowed a different approach in Corinth. He appeared fearful of falling flat on his face in the next Grecian city he visited, so he determined to preach Christ alone, simply, forcefully, authoritatively, rather than communicating logic and sophistication. If the Greeks viewed the cross as foolishness, then he would be Christ's fool for the gospel's sake, but never again would he try to match wits with the wise of this world, rather he

would bring a gospel backed with the power of the Spirit of God, that men's faith would "not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (vs 4,5).

My conclusion to the Mars Hill matter is that the Gospel preacher must be strategic in reaching the right people with the right message, whether it be in Zeus' or Aphrodite's front yard, or shipwrecked on an island like Malta, or traversing the

**All we can do is present Jesus Christ and His gospel – the results must be left with God. Aiming for a big move of God in a big metroplex is a sensible project but reality doesn't always match our expectation. Paul's descent from Mars Hill was different than his ascent.**

hillsides of Galatia and Colossae. Yes, we must be intellectually astute. We must know our audience and must acclimate ourselves to the surroundings. And we do need to be quick to find relevant preaching material and subjects as Paul saw the altar to an Unknown God. His message was indeed relevant. It was indeed sharp. It was indeed understandable. And it did mention the doctrine of the resurrection. But again, it lacked the wind of the Holy Ghost. If you're in question, that came



straight out of Paul's mouth. Thank God for the few that were saved. His "few" were far more than most of our present results. But the revival shaking that would have brought Athens to her knees didn't happen under Paul's missionary campaign.

But it can happen through yours! Like soldiers crawling up the mountainside of the enemy's last bastion of strength, today's church needs to make its final ascent up Mars Hill to seize it as the property of Calvary Hill! Not with "enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power". The Gospel can pierce the minds of the most sophisticated and erudite. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ "for it is the power of God, unto salvation every one who believes, to the Jew first, and also TO THE GREEKS" (Romans 1:16). ●

**Dr. JOSE L.**

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**Acts** of the Apostles provides the historical narration of the expansion of the newly formed Jesus community from Jerusalem to Antioch (Ac.1-12) and from Antioch to the far ends of the Greco-Roman world (Ac.13-28). Through the missionary journeys Paul along with his co-workers planted Christian communities in the Roman province of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece despite the opposition from the Diaspora Jews and the Gentiles. He thoughtfully employed several mission strategies for the founding and nurturing of Christian communities.

Paul was a missionary par excellence in the human history exhibited extraordinary missionary strategies used to preach the gospel and plant ecclesial communities in the pluralistic context of Macedonia and Greece. Even though he was commissioned to be an apostle to the Gentiles his objective on mission was preach the gospel both to the Jews and Gentiles. He travelled through the urban centers preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, making converts in Synagogues, market places and public squares where people gather together for conversation and dialogue.

Luke portrays the missionary activity of Paul to the multicultural settings of Thessalonica, Berea and Athens in Acts 17. Here he narrates the missionary motives, problems, strategies and the accomplishments of Paul. In the second missionary journey he travelled through the Western part of the Roman empire with his travelling companions of Silas, Timothy, and Luke. They travelled through the urban centers of Thessalonica (Ac.17:1-9), Berea (Ac.17:10-15), and Athens (Ac.17:16-34).

### **Paul's Mission Expedition in Thessalonica (Ac.17:1-15)**

After having a successful ministry in Philippi Paul and his companions came to Thessalonica, one of the major cities of the Roman Empire as well as the capital of



the province of Macedonia. He did his ministry in the multicultural, multiethnic communities but he begins to preach the gospel in the Jewish Synagogue. One of the mission strategy Paul adopted was by using Synagogue as a platform to communicate the gospel to a readymade audience comprising of Jews, proselytes and the God fearing Gentiles.

Paul reasoned with the Jewish community in the Synagogue and proved from the Jewish scriptures about the suffering and the resurrection of the messiah (Ac.17:2-3). He tried to prove that Jesus is the Christ from the scriptures. By hearing the proclamation of the suffering and the resurrection of the messiah brought some Jews to the faith and one among them was Jason (Ac.17:6).

By seeing the successful ministry of Paul among the Gentiles in Thessalonica some radical Jews started opposing the ministry of Paul. Paul and Silas were accused of trouble makers and defying 'Caesar's decrees' by proclaiming 'another king named Jesus' (Ac.17:7b). However, 'a large

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number of God fearing Greeks' including many prominent women made positive response towards the gospel (Ac.17:4b).

The jealous Jews collaborated with the native Greeks brought Jason and some believers before the city authorities accusing them of treason. This well calculated charge of sedition was politically a serious crime and it was life threatening. The city Roman political officials were influenced by the mob governance and Jason and others were arrested.

In the midst of the political opportunism finally they came out of the jail on bail (Ac.17:9).

### **Paul's Mission Expedition in Berea (Ac.17:10-15)**

The next place of their missionary journey was Berea about fifty miles south-West of Thessalonica. Paul and Barnabas went to Berea during the night. The people in



Berea took Paul's preaching very seriously and they examined the scriptures day by day (Ac.17:11). Here also Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles. Many of them believed in the gospel and among them were prominent men, women, slaves, and God fearers. However, Paul faced severe opposition here also and some fundamentalist Jews came from Thessalonica, stirred up the crowd in the city. Finally Paul had to leave the city and came to Athens for the next phase of their missionary endeavour.

### **Paul's Mission Expedition in Athens (Ac.17:16-21)**

Paul had to leave Berea and came to Athens the intellectual city of the Roman Empire. Timothy and Silas joined later in Athens to do the ministry. Athens was regarded as the cultural and intellectual center of the Roman world. He

**Paul had to leave Berea and came to Athens the intellectual city of the Roman Empire. Timothy and Silas joined later in Athens to do the ministry. Athens was regarded as the cultural and intellectual center of the Roman world. He encountered the dominant religio-cultural and philosophical people of the time.**

encountered the dominant religio-cultural and philosophical people of the time. He tried to communicate the gospel with a strategy that was very much different from the other places of their ministry expedition.

In the initial visit Paul was greatly disturbed by seeing the city full of idols (Ac.17:16). However, he followed the mission pattern of evangelising in significant urban centers by reasoning in the Synagogue with the Jews and God fearing Gentiles, dialogued in the market place day by day with those who happened to be there (Ac.17:17).

Except on the Sabbath days, Paul bore witness in Agora, the famous market place in Athens. He began to dispute with the most popular philosophical schools of Epicureans and Stoics. Stoics are pantheists who believed that the divine principle to be found everywhere in the world. However, the Epicureans explained everything in terms of natural forces and the defined pleasure as the primary good.

Athenians mocked Paul as a 'babbling.' They were well known for promoting new cults so they thought of Paul as introducing 'new gods' - Jesus and Anesthesia (resurrection).

Areopagus speech gives a clear picture of how Paul converse with the dominant religio-philosophical cultures of Athens. He was taken to the council of Areopagus (Ac.17:22) and started his preaching with an exposition to the 'creator God' (Ac.17:24-25). His speech was based on natural theology similar to the speech in Lystra where the context was totally Gentile (Ac.14:8-20).

Paul preached of a gospel where God's providential care is for all nations (vv.25, 26). He initially appreciated their religiosity and he made use of the inscription on an idol named as the 'unknown god' as the launching pad to share the gospel. He developed the speech by making the relationship between humanity and God (Ac.17:26-28). The creator God is the God of all nature, heaven and the earth. 'He gives everyone life and breath and everything else' and he is the sustainer of the whole universe (Ac.17:24). 'He does not live in temples built by hands'.

God also established orderly seasons and boundaries (Ac.17:26b). Humanity is created to seek God (Ac.17:27a); God is not far from any one of us (Ac.17:27b). As we are his offspring we ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver or stone or an image formed by the art and imagination of the mortals (Ac.17:28-29). In order to prove the nature of the true God Paul uses a quotation 'in him we live, and move and have our being.' 'we are his offspring' from the Greek poet Phaenomena of Aratus from Cilicia, the native place of Apostle Paul. He further says that God made every nation 'from one man' and explains the common ancestry of humanity.

Paul presented the divine providence as a main theological theme for his speech. His speech agrees with the Stoic doctrine of the providence and judgement of God. He admonished the Athenian community to turn towards the creator God and worship Him only.

In conclusion Paul called all people to everywhere to repent because the time of ignorance is over (Ac.17:30).

## MISSION STRATEGIES IN THE LIGHT OF PAUL'S MISSION IN THESSALONICA, BEREIA AND ATHENS

Paul's missionary activities in Thessalonica, Berea and Athens are narrated in Acts of the Apostles 17:1-34. It provides mission strategies which will help the present day missionaries to witness the gospel effectively and to plant churches in pluralist, multicultural settings. Paul addressed his

**The ultimate aim of mission for Paul is to create ecclesial communities/ family of God/ new humanity in Christ in all over the Greco-Roman world.**

audiences uniquely by knowing well the socio-religious and cultural context of the people.

- Paul was a missionary par excellence. He preached the universal nature of the gospel by accepting people from all spheres of life irrespective of their gender, class, culture or creed distinctions. His apostolic mission conviction was that salvation is for all people.
- The ultimate aim of mission for Paul is to create ecclesial communities/ family of God/ new humanity in Christ in all over the Greco-Roman world. He envisioned an ecclesial unified family of God that embraced Jew/Gentile,

- educated/ uneducated, slave/ free, men and women.

- In all over the missionary expeditions Paul and his co-workers went to the Jewish Synagogues- reasoned with them, explaining and proving from the Old Testament scriptures (Ac.17:1; 17:10; 17:17). In the Jewish Synagogue Paul was able to meet a receptive audience of the Diaspora Jews, the proselytes and the Gentiles. These audiences were on a prepared ground to receive the gospel who were expecting the messiah. When he came to Thessalonica and Berea he proclaimed the gospel to the Jews in the Synagogue but when he came to Athens he proclaimed the same message to a purely Gentile audience. In all these places some Jews responded to the gospel and later the Gentiles also became part of the ecclesial community.
- Paul chose the socio-economic strategic centers to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He also selected the provincial capitals of the Roman Empire to communicate the gospel. There metropolitan city centers such as Thessalonica representing the whole region. He probably was thinking the filtering phenomena of filling the whole region with the Gospel. They were metropolitan cities where so many cultures intermingled.
- Paul adapted the religio-culture of the cities as he proclaimed the gospel by recognizing and appreciating the diverse socio-cultural and religious identities. His speech at Areopagus is quite famous for the adaptability, inclusiveness and openness to the Gentile culture. In Athens he gave a message by using the natural theology. He appreciated their religiosity and presented the gospel from their own

understanding of God. He was flexible enough to accept other cultures and accommodate enough to present the truth of the gospel by taking their scriptures and traditions.

- Paul always presented the gospel in an intelligible and acceptable manner.
- In the midst of opposition Paul was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to move from one location to the other.
- Paul and his companions made use of their constitutional rights and the legal privileges whenever they were arrested and put them in jail.
- For Paul the mission is a cooperative venture not a one person project. He accomplished his vision to establish churches in all over the Greco-Roman world not by his own effort but

by making use of his colleagues and independent workers. He made use of his colleagues like Silas, Timothy and Luke and many others in his missionary journeys. He also used independent workers from the local churches like Jaison (Priscilla, Aquila, and Epaphras) to build up ecclesial communities.

- After establishing the ecclesial communities in all through the different Roman provinces Paul continued to build up churches through writing letters and sending representatives in his absence.
- Paul's conviction for the vocation to reach out the gospel to the ends of the earth is portrayed through the nature of his extensive mission travels. He must have travelled approximately fifteen to twenty thousand Kilometers without the help of the modern facilities.


### Missional implication to the Indian Context

Luke's beautiful description of Paul's three missionary journeys and his mission

activities gives sufficient knowledge about the Christian mission enterprise of the early church. Pauline mission strategies may not be fully applicable to the Indian context because of a totally different historical-socio-cultural and religious context which is far different from the first century Roman imperial context.

Paul travelled extensively to different geographical locations without the modern travel facilities of motor vehicles or air travels, so how much more privileged the present day Christian missionaries are to go and communicate the gospel to the far and wide of the Indian geographical locations.

The Indian political, religious, linguistic, cultural, racial and economic diversity is different from the first century world. The synagogues platform that Paul made use of in the first century world is not available to the present day India. It is definitely more complex than what Paul encountered during his missionary endeavours. However, some of the missionary strategies he



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used like adaptability, inculturation, contextualisation and making use of the native religious scriptures to communicate the gospel would very well help the present day missionaries in our endeavours.

If Paul was alive today he would have gone to the Hindu major shrines of India where people gathered in masses and proclaimed the gospel by appreciating their religiosity and pointing to 'an unknown god' of India. He would preach the gospel of freedom from the Sin and death by not enforcing his cultural strapping on the Gentile converts.

There are political accusations that we face in India like Paul and the missionaries faced in Thessalonica and the Christian missionaries were accused of anti-national. Such occasions making use of the constitutional rights and legal procedures as right citizens of India are very much important.

The present day Christian mission does not much appreciative of the missionary

approach of Paul of the first century. At the same time the Western forms of Christian mission bring little impact on the Indian soil like big conventions and crusades. Sometimes the derogatory terms that we use are misleading (eg.crusades). We need to be sensitive to the surrounding cultural context of today.

The Christian community in India is still a minority in the midst of religious pluralism and the religious fundamentalism. Present day Indian apostles could wisely adopt the use of 'Hindu Sanskrit slogas' where we see the 'unknown god' to present the gospel.

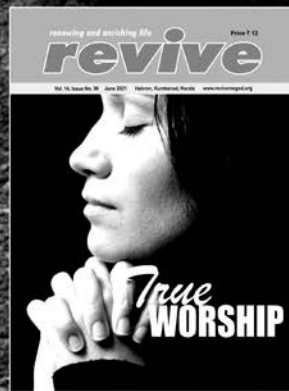
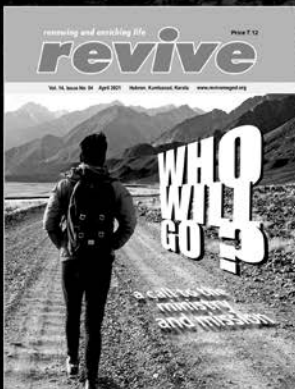
Instead of big conventions of today we may have to call for small open air community gatherings and fellowships and make use of the Indian communicative system of 'Kathaprasangam' and Indian music like 'Bhajans', 'Kirtan' and 'Kavali'. But the saddest part of Indian Christians are most our missionaries are not aware of the Sanskrit Slogas, Bhajans and Kirtans they use in their daily lives.

Christian mission must be open to adopt the cultural situations of India. The Christian faith must be reinterpreted according to the nuances of the cultural situations of the different states of India. The gospel of the Lord Jesus must be rooted in the Indian soil to produce its fruits. In a multilingual, multicultural context like India we need to preach the gospel to everyone in the languages and the culture in which they understand.

Historically the present day Indian mission had passed through two thousand years and the truth of the gospel is unchanged. Our Indian population is very, very religious and they are thirsty for the living water and we need to lead them to the living water in which they may able to drink and be satisfied.



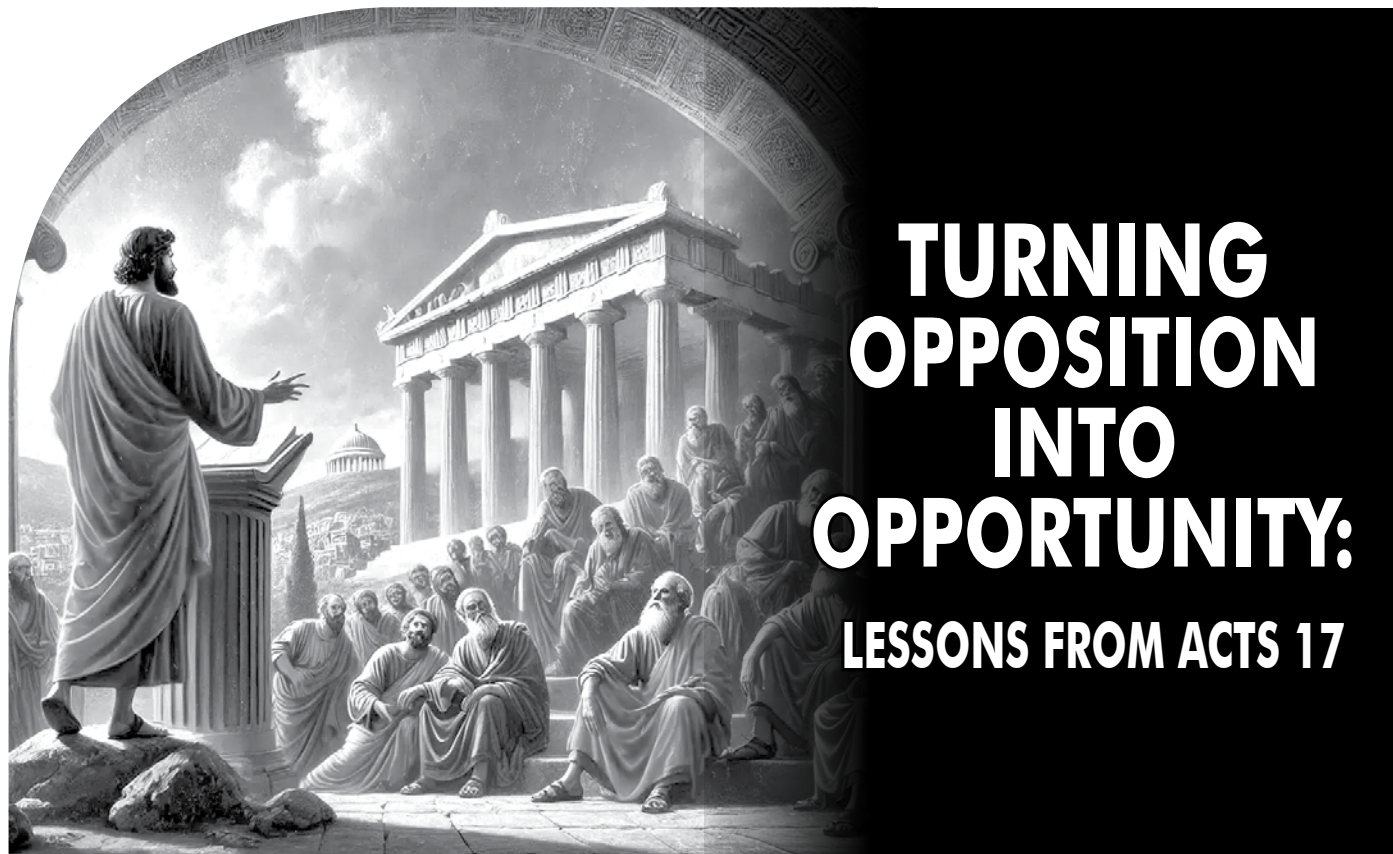
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# TURNING OPPOSITION INTO OPPORTUNITY: LESSONS FROM ACTS 17



**PASTOR P.J. DANIEL**

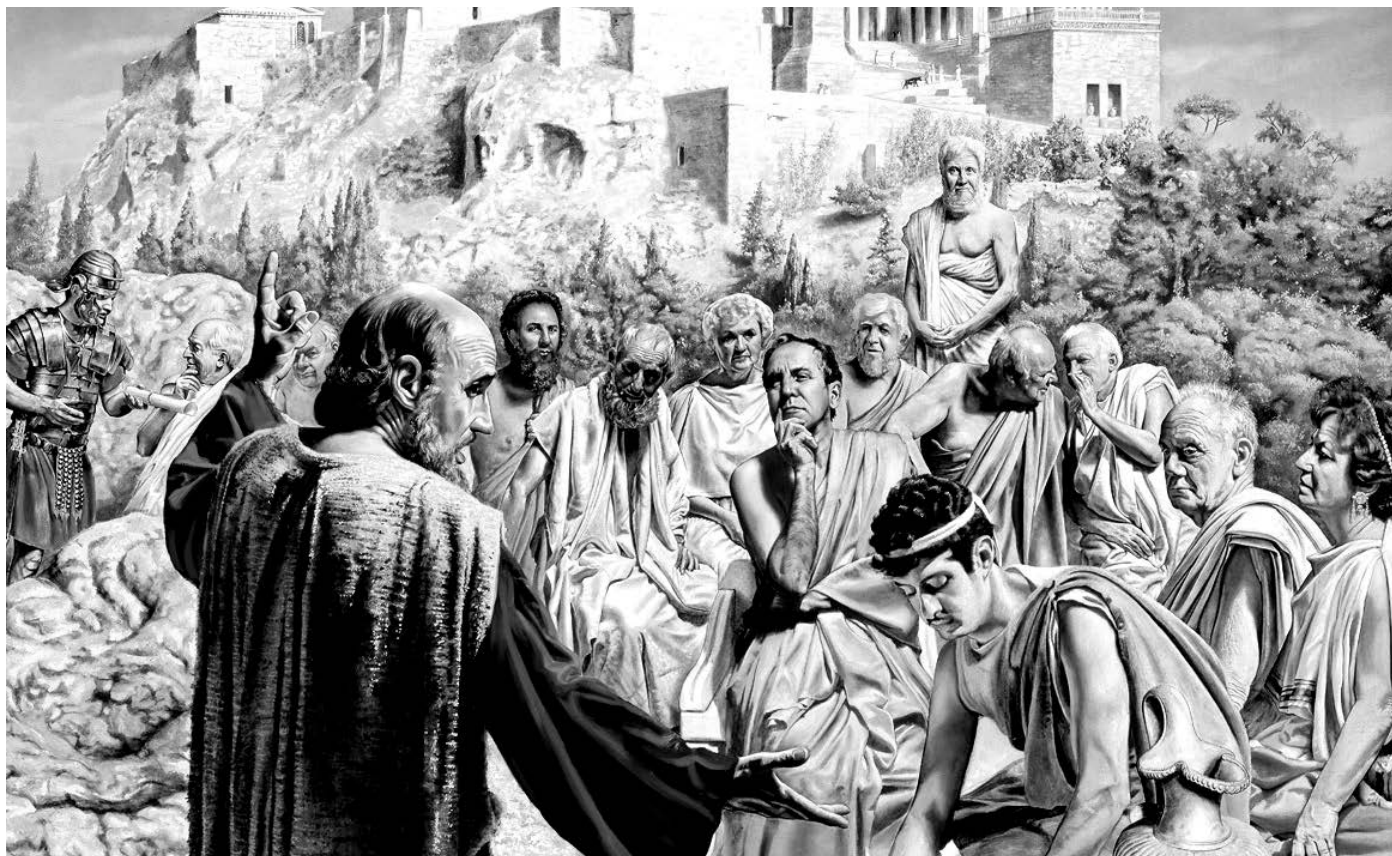
Faculty, India Bible College  
and Seminary

## INTRODUCTION

Oppositions never block opportunity, they rather enlarge the doors of opportunity. The famous statement of Paul in the first Epistle to Corinthians “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9) is a challenge to Christians in every era. Challenges emerge in enthusiasm to confront the adversaries, which aggrandizes the growth of the church. Opposition from outside of the Church stabilizes it and it turns into a catalyst to the growth of the Church. Opposition from inside the church not only divides but also destroys it. So, Challenges from outside the Church are new openings in the mission field.

Acts chapter seventeen continues Luke’s narrative of the apostle Paul’s second missionary journey, focusing on his ministry in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Paul, Silas, and Timothy arrive in Thessalonica after the historic event at Philippi – the miraculous intervention of God at the Philippian jail.

Paul never parks himself idle but, is always on the move, to preach the gospel convincing Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Saviour. This irritated some of the Jewish leaders, who stirred up opposition leading to a mob attack. As a result, Paul and Silas fled to Berea. The Bereans gave them a warm welcome. They were nobler than the Thessalonians because they not only listened to the Word but also searched the Scriptures to find out whether these things were so. When the ministry of these missionaries mounted up, the adversaries stirred up the enemies to curtail the expansion of the gospel. Paul alone fled to Athens. He always finds opportunities. He preached the risen Jesus Christ to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the agora. Some believed and many mocked. Thus Acts seventeen reflects that oppositions can become



openings to new mission opportunities when faced with faith, flexibility, and a focus on God's sovereignty.

### Turning Opposition into Opportunity

Successful leaders believe that every adversity brings along with it an advantage. They believe there is always opportunity on the other side. It works as a catalyst to expand our vision and mission. Turning opposition into opportunity can be a way to clarify our purpose, mission, and conviction. Opposition can be an opportunity to improve our faith and build spiritual muscle. God has a way of making all things (even bad things) work together for good! As a leader, growth is our best tool for turning adversity into opportunity.

### Finding New Openings

The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was an event of first importance. As per William Barclay, the great Roman road

“  
**Opposition had led Paul into a strategic spot for the enhancement of the kingdom of God. As usual, Paul commenced his ministry in the synagogue which elevated the growth of the kingdom of God and extended even to the Gentiles.**  
 ”

from the Adriatic Sea to the Middle East was called the Ignatian Way, and the main street of Thessalonica was part of that road. If Christianity is firmly founded in Thessalonica, it could spread both east and west along that until it became a highway for the progress of the kingdom of God. Opposition had led Paul into a strategic spot for the enhancement of the kingdom of God. As usual, Paul commenced his ministry in the synagogue which elevated the growth of the kingdom of God and extended even to the Gentiles. The people of this area up roared that 'these men who have turned the world upside down have come here.' When Christianity goes into action it must cause a revolution both in the life of the individual and in the life of the society.

Berea was 60 miles west of Thessalonica. His ministry in Berea as elsewhere was based on the Scripture. Bereans were nobler than the Thessalonians because they had not only heard the word but also searched scriptures to find out whether these things were so. Paul set the people of Berea searching the scriptures and established them in the Word. Anyone who is certainly founded on the foundation of the rock – the Word of God – will never be shattered. Such well-established men in the Word of God will be strong and steady in the mission field in perilous times. It is a paradigm to everyone that the mission work should not be established on miracles or signs but purely on the Word of God. It is remarkable that these missionaries had performed no miracles in these places. The churches that have been established on the foundation of the Word of God will intensify their attitude and values of life, which will be the soul of missions.

During these perilous oppositions, it is amazing to note the courage of Paul. He had been imprisoned in Philippi; he had left Thessalonica in peril of his life, under cover of darkness; and once again in Berea, he had to flee for his life. When most men would have abandoned a struggle that seemed to be the end of his life, Paul as a man of courage prevailed against all oppositions. He turned all opposition to opportunities. The idea of turning back will never profit the progress in the mission field.

### Adapting to New Opportunities

When Paul fled from Berea, he found himself alone in Athens, but he never stopped preaching Christ. It was said that there were more

statues of gods in Athens than elsewhere, and it was easier to meet a god than man. Moreover, Athens was the cradle of philosophy. Epicureans and Stoics were found everywhere in the agora. Paul's experience in Athens (Acts 17: 16-34) is a powerful example of cultural engagement and contextualization in evangelism. Paul takes time to understand Athen's culture, noticing the pervasive idolatry. He recognizes the 'altar to the unknown

**Paul set the people of Berea searching the scriptures and established them in the Word. Anyone who is certainly founded on the foundation of the rock – the Word of God – will never be shattered.**

god' using it as a conversation starter. He interacts with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the agora, demonstrating his familiarity with their ideas. Paul tailors his sermon to his audience, addressing their philosophical and cultural concerns. He quotes Greek Poets (17:28). Thus, Paul connects the gospel to the Athenians' existing knowledge and values. The key elements in his sermon are notable. He acknowledges the religiosity of Athens, describes God's immutable attributes, and presents the gospel, highlighting Jesus' resurrection as evidence. But his message sparks varied responses, from mockery to belief.

From this event at Mars Hill, it is conspicuous that today, it is inevitable to understand the local values, concerns, and culture. Adapt our presentation to resonate with our audience, and incorporate relevant examples and illustrations. It is very important to share the gospel with clarity and sensitivity. By emulating Paul's approach in Athens, we can effectively engage our own cultures and communities, sharing the gospel in a way that resonates with those around us.

A vibrant missionary never anticipates favourable circumstances, instead, turns all unfavourable circumstances into opportunities for the spreading of the gospels.

### Opposition is a fuel to Excellence

Apostle Paul exclaims that most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by his chains, are much bolder to speak the word without fear. (Philippines 1: 14) Paul also reiterates that His chains have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippines 1:12) All the oppositions raised against Paul have become fuel to the furtherance of the gospel. The challenges always refine and strengthen our faith (I Peter 1: 6,7), and also inspire our boldness and perseverance (Acts 4:29-31) It fosters spiritual growth and maturity (James 1: 2-4)

### Conclusion

Acts seventeen provides a compelling example of how the opposition can become opening to new mission opportunities. Oppositions disperse believers, which enables spreading the gospel to new areas. Wherever we reach adjust our approach to engage with different audiences. Expect opposition but remain faithful. Adapt our approach to reach a diverse audience. View opposition as a catalyst for growth and expansion. Yes, may we, like Paul, turn obstacles into opportunities for the advancement of God's kingdom.



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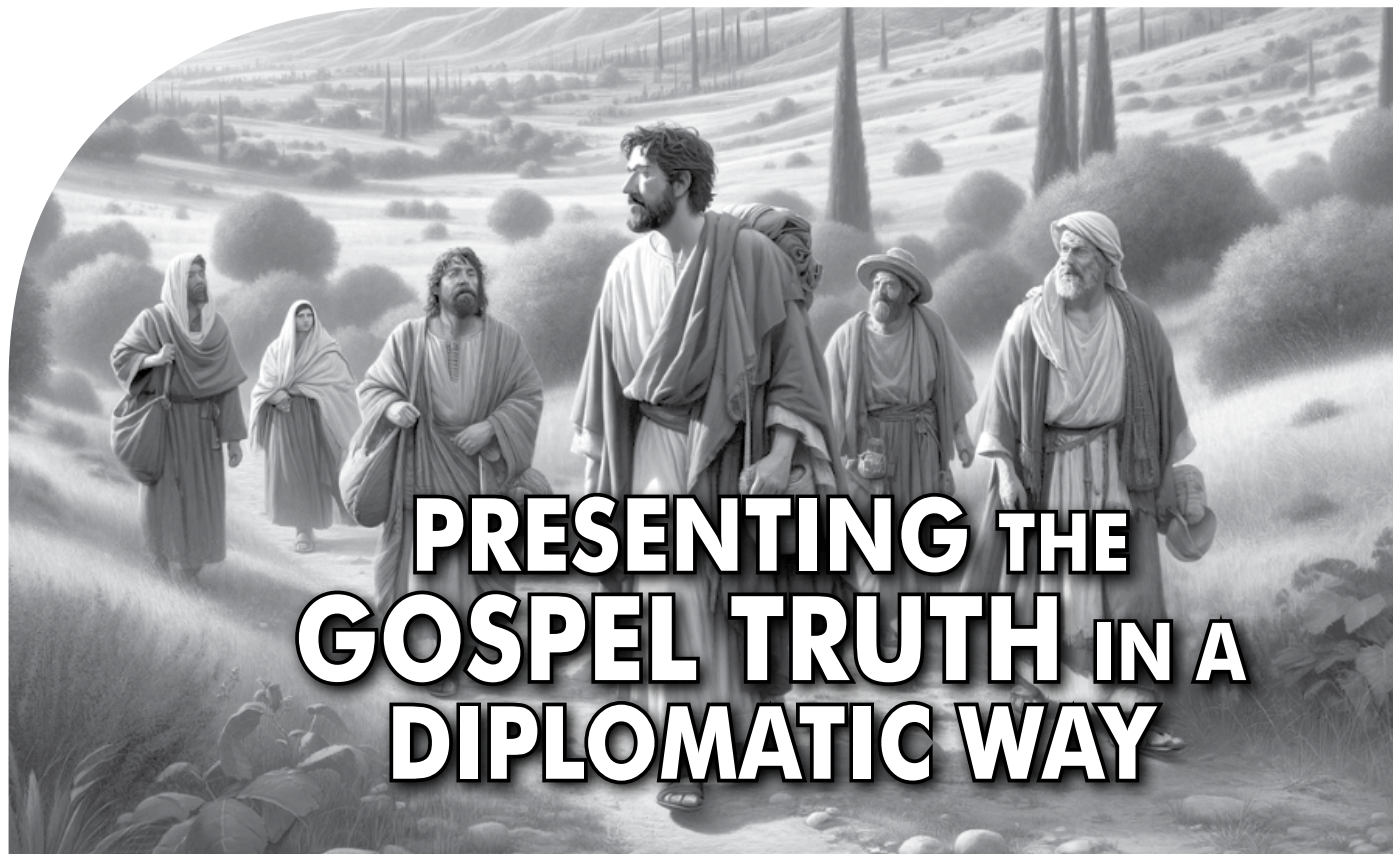
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### **J.N. MANOKARAN**

A Civil Engineer by profession. God called him and his family to be missional leader in Haryana as cross cultural missionaries for eleven years. Since, 1997 they returned back to Tamil Nadu to help missionaries and pastors to build their capacities by teaching, training and writing.

**Three** Christian women were arrested for distributing Christian literature in one city in India. The reason was that they distributed some news published in the Illustrated Weekly, a now defunct magazine, in the year 1987. The news report states that the divine light that appears in one popular shrine once a year is neither natural nor supernatural but the handiwork of vested interests. Hence, the literature claims that there is only one Light: The Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Diplomatic presentation of the gospel**

Disciples are called to proclaim the gospel, the truth, and not to be involved in the work of demolishing myths directly, that would offend the people of other faiths. When truth is placed and positioned appropriately, that will attract people. There is no need to be involved in negative tactics of attacking many aspects of other religions.

When nations who are not friends have a conversation, use diplomacy in words, attitude, and action. That is called diplomacy. Gospel preachers should have that skill of diplomacy in communicating the gospel. Paul is a good example of being diplomatic according to the crowd and with concern presenting the good news. The altar which was dedicated to the unknown god, became the starting point for presenting the gospel. In the same way, a common ground or something that points towards the need for salvation or saviour should be discerned. Then that aspect could be used as a metaphor to present the gospel.

### **Typology and Redemption Analogy**

On the Emmaus Road, Lord Jesus Christ after resurrection explained to the two disciples



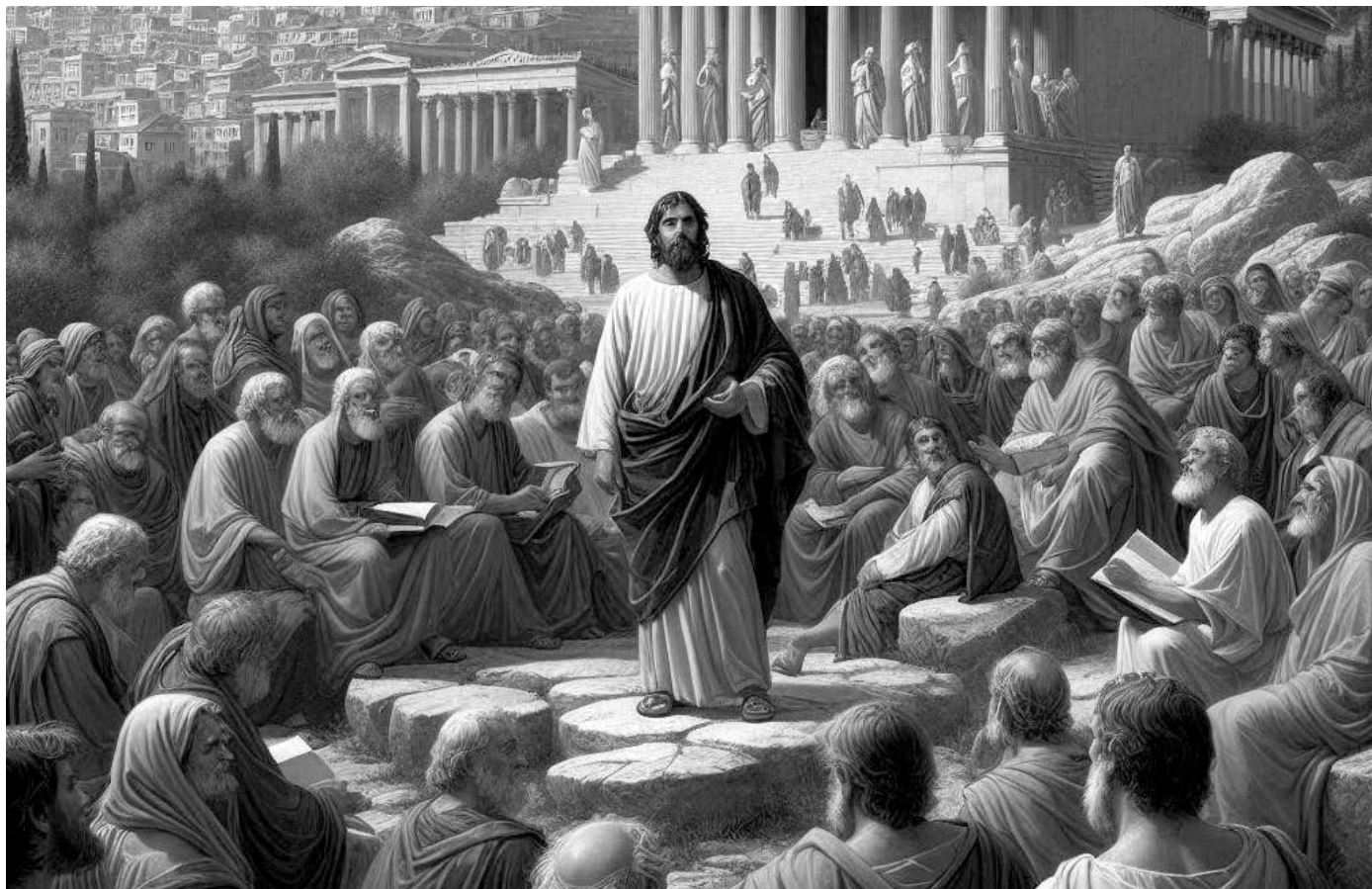
about Himself from the Old Testament. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27) What did he explain to those disciples? Nevertheless, their eyes of understanding were opened, and their hearts warmed with the love of God.

Typology or a type is the initiative of God who placed in history a special example or symbol or picture that points to future larger fulfillment. In other words, a type of Christ is a person or a thing that exhibits or resembles the character of Lord Jesus Christ. Paul mentions the type as he referred to Lord Jesus Christ as the Second Adam. (Romans 5:14) The type is also mentioned as a shadow, a figure, a copy or a model, or an image. Moses, Passover Lamb, Moses, Jonah, the bronze serpent, High Priest, Showbread, Menorah...etc. Typology is determined in the Scriptural revelation. Inspired by the Holy Spirit the

**On the Emmaus Road, Lord Jesus Christ after resurrection explained to the two disciples about Himself from the Old Testament. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).**

biblical authors have mentioned them. Searching the scripture and learning is a human part of understanding.

God is already at work in all cultures before a missionary goes there. Some forms of signs or rituals point towards the redemption expressed in the gospel. 'The Peace Child', a book written by Don Richardson brought focus to this. Don Richardson (June 23, 1935 – December 23, 2018) was a Canadian missionary who served in Western New Guinea, Indonesia. Three tribal villages were in constant battle at this time. The Richardsons were considering leaving the area, so to keep them there, the Sawi people in the embattled villages came together and decided to make peace with their hated enemies. Ceremonies commenced in which



young children were exchanged between opposing villages. One man in particular ran toward his enemy's camp and literally gave his son to his hated foe. Observing this, Richardson wrote: "If a man would actually give his own son to his enemies, that man could be trusted!" Following this event many villagers converted to Christianity, a translation of the New Testament in Sawi was published, and thousands of patients from among the Sawi and neighboring tribes were treated by Carol. The world's largest circular building made strictly from unmilled poles was constructed in 1972 as a Christian meeting place by the Sawi.

Essentially, what is understood as typology, is in dimmer forms in other cultures, which is termed as

**Paul also preached that through one man the people in the whole world belonging to various nations came into being. Hence, God is the creator of all people and nations. Paul presented an attribute of God that is accepted even by non-Christians.**

Redemption Analogy. Paul writes that the Redemption Analogy is there in all cultures: "Yet he did not leave himself without witness." (Acts 14:17) Hence, it is essential to understand God's Providence and Sovereign in the cultures, when a missionary goes to share the gospel.

### **Paul's methods**

Paul did not begin from the Old Testament of Mosaic Law or Psalms or Prophets when he spoke to a non-Jewish crowd. Instead, he chose to address them helping them to see God, from their religious traditions or rituals. He even commended the people of Athens as a religious people.

### **Principle 1: A Common Ground**

There would be some kind of commonness of knowledge or experience or similarities that could be used as the starter for a conversation. Paul used what he saw in Athens, that was a common knowledge as the starter for his preaching.

## To the Unknown God

Around 500 BC there was a terrible plague in Athens. Epimenides, considered a sage, brought a herd of sheep, and starved them. Then he let loose, and the sheep started to graze. Few went further without grazing but lay down. Epimenides asked people to build an altar near those sheep that laid down and sacrificed them on the altar. That altar was inscribed with: To the Unknown God.

### Principle 2: The absolute need for revelation

Intellectual pursuits, traditional rituals, hard penance, philosophy, alms, pilgrimage, and good works...are not sufficient for a human to know God or the Path of Salvation. Even the learned philosophers needed a revelation to know God, as Paul presented the gospel to them. The philosophers of Athens failed to understand God, though there was a desire for it. Hence, they needed revelation, which was presented by Paul as he preached the gospel. In today's context also all humans, including intellectuals, ritualists, traditionalists, and the religious, need the revelation of the Scripture.

### Principle 3: Attributes of God: Creator

Paul also preached that through one man the people in the whole world belonging to various nations came into being. Hence, God is the creator of all people and nations. Paul presented an attribute of God that is accepted even by non-Christians. Only when the truth of the creator is realized, there is the possibility for sharing about the Saviour. Hence, Paul begins from the creation, and God a benevolent and generous creator.

### Principle 4: Commendation, not condemnation

Paul tries to find and commends the best in their culture. He commended Athens for their religiosity in search of God. People in Athens must have concluded, that despite having so many gods, there could be some more or someone, whom they did not know. There could be a chief

of Gods. In essence, Paul commended them for their search, willingness to explore more like the unknown God, humility to acknowledge that they do not have complete knowledge and so, will be willing to accept the true God.

Sadly, many preachers instead of looking for aspects of commendation, look for the weaker or darker part of other religions to condemn. Hence, hostility and animosity against Christians increase. It is not fair to compare the best of one entity with the worst of another entity.

### Principle 5: Paul quotes from Greek poets:

Epimenides the Cretan (600 BC) (he is quoted again in Titus 1:12) and Aratus (310 BC.) Paul quoted them not as prophets, but in their writings, there are some traces of biblical truths. God has placed these truths even in their literature. These truths could be used as the beginning for a meaningful conversation. These kinds of literature or folk songs or proverbs could be used as a bridge to approach them.

### Principle 6: Offspring of God

Paul uses a wise argument to help people to understand their foolishness. Paul said that humans are the offspring of God. Paul taught them that man-made gods of gold, silver, or stone cannot produce offspring. Hence, Athens must search and find the true living God. The search must not be using sheep to find a place to build an altar to the unknown God.

### Principle 7: Ignorance as sin

The Athens by their inscription have declared that they do not know about God, i.e., ignorance. Paul says that their ignorance is no excuse, instead they will be judged. If ignorance of law is no excuse, then ignorance of truth also there is no excuse. Hence, the Athens are liable to be punished for their ignorance.

### Principle 8: Accountable to God

All humans are accountable to God and shall face judgment. Paul explained the judgment as righteous judgment because

the Lord Jesus is the righteous judge. God has raised His Son the Lord Jesus Christ from death, who is the saviour. This savior when the door of grace is closed, would be the judge.

### Principle 9: Speaking Truth in Love

The gospel is certainly the presentation of the Truth, but the Truth is to be presented in Love. The mandate for presenting the truth is to help people find the light and life and not condemn people and their cultural heritage. So, love must liberate and set people free. Truth is like a bitter medicine, in a sugar-coated capsule.

### Principle 10: Call for Repentance

Paul's speech concludes with a call for repentance. Gospel always demands a response. People have to repent and receive the Lord as their saviour or they should reject Him. On certain occasions, the people may ask for more teaching or time to repent.

### Challenge

Christian call is to witness, share the gospel, and teach the Scripture to the whole world. Exalting the Lord Jesus Christ, and His uniqueness is an important mission. There are no equals or remotely close to the Lord and the gospel in the world. False religions, false gods, false sects, and cults will always be there. One plus one equals two is the right answer. There are billions of wrong answers. In the same manner, there is Only One Name Lord Jesus Christ through which we have salvation. (Acts 4:12) Let us faithfully proclaim the gospel.



The Practical Ministry annual program of India Bible College & Seminary was held on December 15, 2024. IGO campus welcomed more than 100 migrant laborers belonging to the Tamil, Telugu and Hindi-speaking communities. Our students engage in outreach ministry every weekend among these communities. It was a joyous occasion to fellowship with them. Our students presented various songs and skits in different Indian languages, and our faculty delivered meaningful Christmas messages in the vernacular. The vision of India Bible College and Seminary is to proclaim Christ and build His church in all of India and our mission is to train Christ's people to fulfill His Great Command and Commission.



Rev. Boda William Lazarus Antony gave the Christmas message in Telugu.



Dr. Jose L. starts the program with prayer.



Rev. Abraham Chacko, Co-ordinator, Practical Ministry Dept.



Pastor Sunny encourages the Hindi fellowship with his presence



Rev. Wilson Varghese shared the reason for Christ's birth to Hindi speaking friends.



Pastor Annadurai greets the community.



Skits and programs by IBC students and faculty kept the audience engaged.





Choreography by our sisters.



Students compered the evening's event in various languages.



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Message of Christmas being presented through lively skits



Lt. Col. V.I. Luke and Mrs. Starla Luke enjoy the evening.



Christmas message in Tamil: Evang. Arpritharaj



Special guests: Bro. Stanly John, Annie, Lara & Yana



Lara Stanly enthralled the audience with her melodious singing





Mrs. Starla Luke appreciates the Practical Ministry for their reaching out each weekend

