

Turning the World Upside Down

Acts 17:1-15

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In partnership with George Barna, Arizona Christian University just released its annual American Worldview Inventory. The results were disappointing, discouraging, and disheartening. Out of 176 million Americans who identify as Christians, just *six percent* hold a recognizably Christian worldview.

Barna calls those who subscribe to a Christian worldview “Integrated Disciples.” Here’s some good news about the beliefs of Integrated Disciples...

- 99% believe the Bible is the accurate Word of God.
- 99% believe God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, and just Creator of the universe who still rules today.
- 88% believe God has a reason for everything.

Now, here’s the bad news about the beliefs of this most committed group of Christians...

- 25% say there is no absolute moral truth.
- 33% subscribe to karma.
- 52% believe people are basically good.
- 39% contend the Holy Spirit is not a real, living being but is merely a symbol of God’s power, presence, or purity.

In a recent *Breakpoint* podcast, John Stonestreet calls this last finding the most troubling part of the survey. I agree because the Bible is clear the Holy Spirit is a “*Who*,” not a “*What*.” He is a “*He*,” not an “*it*” or a “*force*.” The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. He convicts of sin, and is our promised helper, teacher, sanctifier, comforter, and counselor.

There’s no way to understand the Book of Acts without recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit. Some commentators prefer the title, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” since there are 55 references to the Holy Spirit in Acts alone. Because we have the Holy Spirit, you and I can now fulfill the mission mandate found in Acts 1:8: “***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be***

my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

I'd like to draw our attention to a statement made by the enemies of the gospel about the missionary team recorded in Acts 17:6: **“These men who have turned the world upside down.”** That's quite a statement, isn't it? This small team is credited with turning the entire world upside down!

I'm afraid instead of turning our world upside down for Christ, many American Christians have allowed the world to turn them upside down. This no doubt explains our limited impact in our culture today.

Vance Havner once said, *“We are not going to move this world by criticism of it nor conformity to it, but by the combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God.”*

Last weekend we celebrated how *God uses many methods to get His message out from Acts 16*. We focused on how God reached a religious woman, a rejected teenager, and a regular guy. Today, we're in the first part of Acts 17, where we will be challenged with this truth: *To turn the world upside down, the Word must first turn us inside out.*

BTW, I'll be out of town next weekend for a Keep Believing Ministries retreat with Ray Pritchard. I've asked Rev. Justin Rumley to preach. Justin grew up at Edgewood and graduated from Moody with both an undergraduate and master's degree. He is pastoring in Kewanee and serves as the Spiritual Life Director and Bible Teacher at Peoria Christian School. In August, we had the joy of ordaining Justin in August.

Brothers and sisters, we have two primary roles if we hope to turn the world upside down with the gospel.

- Explain the Word.
- Examine the Word.

Please turn to Acts 17:1 to discover where the team landed after leaving Philippi: **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.”** Traveling on the Via Ignatia, which was a Roman highway, they passed through two towns to get to Thessalonica.

Let's look at our first role.

1. Explain the Word. Let's ponder Acts 17:2-3: *“And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’”*

Paul's strategy involved finding key cities, locating a synagogue, and preaching the gospel. His approach in Thessalonica involved four key elements:

- **Reasoned.** Notice how he reasoned *“from the Scriptures.”* Paul spoke back and forth, likely using the Socratic method, which involved the use of questions to engage the listeners.
- **Explained.** To explain means, *“to open what was closed; to unroll.”* Paul took the time to make sure his listeners understood what he was saying. He was following the model of Jesus when He opened the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus as stated in Luke 24:32: *“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?”*
- **Proved.** The word *“prove”* refers to *“setting forth arguments by laying evidence before someone.”* Paul presented compelling evidence how Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies found in the Old Testament. My guess is he went to Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 to establish how it was necessary for Jesus to both *“suffer and to rise from the dead.”* Jesus was clear about this in Mark 8:31: *“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* Notably, all of Peter and Paul's sermons in Acts are built around the resurrection. As John Stott says, *“Christianity is a resurrection religion.”*
- **Proclaimed.** To *“proclaim”* means they *“declared loudly and plainly”* that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the anointed One.

Verse 4 tells us many received the message: *“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.”* To be *“persuaded”* means they were *“convinced.”* Some Jews, along with a throng of Greeks, and many leading women believed. We're reminded again how the gospel is for Jew and Greek, for men and women.

Verses 5-9 reveal there were others who rejected the message: *“But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the*

city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’ ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.”

Because so many became believers in Jesus, the Jews were jealous and decided to recruit some rabble to start a riot. The King James is quite descriptive: **“certain lewd fellows of the baser sort.”** They riled everyone up and traveled as a mob to the house of Jason, who was likely a relative of Paul according to Romans 16:21. When they couldn’t find Paul, they dragged Jason before the authorities and made this statement: **“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”** The missionary team had quite a testimony! So far, they had only been to Philippi in Macedonia, which was located 100 miles away, and already had the reputation of turning the **“world upside down.”**

Paul and his team *explained* the Word clearly and compellingly. We must do the same.

The Jews charged the team of missionaries with subversive sedition claiming they were: **“saying there is another king, Jesus.”** The word **“another”** means, **“another of a different kind.”** This reminds me of what the Jewish leaders said to Pilate about Jesus in John 19:12, 15: **“Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar...we have no king but Caesar.”** This charge of treason riled everyone up so they made Jason post bail to ensure Paul would not come back.

To turn the world upside down, the Word must first turn us inside out.

There’s a second challenge we see in our passage.

2. Examine the Word. The next stop on their journey is described in verse 10: **“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.”** This was not the first time Paul fled from a city under the cover of darkness (see Acts 9:35). In a real sense, Paul and Silas were following the command of Jesus from Matthew 10:23: **“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.”**

In contrast to Thessalonica, Berea was off the beaten path, where members of the aristocracy lived, kind of like a retirement village for wealthy military, political and educational leaders. Once again, the team immediately headed to the synagogue to preach the gospel. Verse 11 tells us these ***“Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”*** The word ***“noble”*** means, ***“refined and open minded.”***

There were two traits which made them stand out as noble.

- **They eagerly received the Word.** The word ***“eagerness”*** has the idea of enthusiastic readiness, and ***“received”*** refers to ***“accepting an offer by taking it to oneself.”*** They listened with rapt attention and absorbed the truth. This eager acceptance is illustrated in Psalm 119:18: ***“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”*** They were living out Isaiah 34:16: ***“Seek and read from the book of the LORD.”***
- **They examined the Scriptures daily.** The Bereans were eager to receive the Word, but they also examined the evidence. The word ***“examine”*** refers to ***“discerning, testing, scrutinizing, and sifting.”*** This word was used of a judicial investigation done for a trial. They were committed to get to the core of what was being said to determine whether it was true.

This was a daily discipline for them, not just something they did occasionally. I like how one paraphrase puts it: ***“They searched the Scriptures day by day to check up on Paul and Silas’ statements to see if they were really so.”*** They took the Scriptures so seriously so they wouldn’t be misled. They put Psalm 1:1-2 into practice: ***“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.”***

Because the Bereans believed in the sufficiency of Scripture, they immersed themselves in God’s inspired Word, studying the Scripture scrolls daily. They were careful and cautious about what they believed. Scripture alone was their sole arbiter of what was true, and what was false. To say the Scriptures are sufficient means the Bible is all we need to equip us for a life of faith and service. Scripture is sufficient because the Bible is the only inspired, inerrant, and final authority. The sufficiency of Scripture also means Scripture itself is sufficient to interpret Scripture.

Incidentally, Paul wrote follow-up letters to many of the churches he started to correct error. For example, last week we learned what happened in Philippi and later Paul wrote the Book of Philippians to the church in Philippi. In the first part of Acts 17, we were introduced to what happened in Thessalonica and later he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians to them. Interestingly, you won't find 1 and 2 Bereans in your Bible! Perhaps that's because the Bereans were so focused on the sufficiency of Scripture there was nothing for Paul to correct.

This week I smiled as I reread the introduction to the Edgewood Statement of Faith: *"This Church holds the following statement of faith as being a summary of Christian doctrine whose **authority consists only in its agreement with the Word of God.**"*

Not surprisingly, the very first doctrine listed deals with Scripture: *"We believe that the Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, was written by men divinely inspired and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction. That it has God for its Author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter. That it reveals the principles of God and is the **final authority for all Christian faith and life.**"*

In the Book of Acts, the preaching of truth caused some to be transformed while others stirred up trouble. We see this in verses 12-13: ***"Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds."*** Preaching the gospel often leads to persecution. We'll learn more about how to pray for the persecuted church November 13-14.

To avoid another riot, verses 14-15 tell us what the believers did: ***"Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed."***

How to Be a Better Berean

I came across a helpful blog post written by Kevin DeYoung in which he gave ten ways "To Be a Better Berean." I'm going to adapt this to our context by giving six

ways we can be more like the royal Bereans and less like the rabble from Thessalonica.

1. **Listen to sermons with an open Bible.** It's important to check what I say with what the Scriptures say. I work hard at being true to the Word, but I'm not infallible. While I would never knowingly mislead you, that doesn't mean I'm not capable of doing so. The best part of every sermon should arise from the truth *you* see in the text, not from a funny illustration or my own clever insights. 1 Thessalonians 5:21: ***“But test everything; hold fast what is good.”***

It would be great to get in the habit of bringing your Bible with you or putting it on your lap if you're engaging online. Also, you may want to sign up for the weekly sermon email which includes a sheet for taking notes which is emailed every Friday. They're also available at the Resource Kiosks.

2. **Be in God's Word every day.** The only way to grow is to get God's Word in your mind and heart so you can live it out through your hands and feet. If you say you don't have time, consider getting up earlier or staying up later. To help you learn what God has for you, Pastor Tim compiles a new Bible Reading Plan each month. You can pick one up at the Resource Kiosk or by going to the app or website. Beth and I both use these reading plans.

Several weeks ago, I received a call from an Edgewood member named Susan Tomlinson. She told me she uses these plans each month. Recently, during her time in God's Word, she was moved by God's heart for the hurting, widows, orphans, the poor, and missionaries. She became convicted of the need to support a missionary and asked if I could recommend one. I told her about Shalom Warrington, who is raising support to serve the deaf community in an unreached country. They have now connected. All this came about because Susan is in God's Word every day. BTW, when I called to ask her permission to share this, she was in the middle of studying Philippians 2, and it was 10:00 in the morning!

For nearly five years, Susan has been reading the listed passage and then writing out the study notes from the Life Application Study Bible. She mentioned she has filled at least 10 books with notes so far! I then asked her how long she studies each day and she said, *“Two to three hours a day, but sometimes it's shorter and it's only an hour.”* When I tried to compliment

her for what she's doing, she quickly said, *"It's all for the glory of God. If you spend time in God's Word, you'll become one of the most blessed people in the world. I'm privileged to be able to do this. To God be the glory. Great things He has done."*

- 3. Go deep in the Scriptures.** This week we put carnitas in our Crock pot. It was outstanding because it simmered all day. It was certainly better than a microwaved hot dog would have been. Take the time to savor the Scriptures. Read and reflect. Mediate and marinate. Search the Scriptures; don't just skim the surface. God works in our lives as we get His Word into our lives. He works more like a crock pot than a microwave. Sinclair Ferguson says, *"We are to work at Bible study. The Scriptures do not disclose their riches to lazy minds and hearts."*

To help you go deeper, consider using a Study Bible and following this acrostic called SPECS.

- S – Does the passage speak of any SIN to be forsaken?
- P – Is there any PROMISE to be claimed?
- E – Is there an EXAMPLE to be followed?
- C – Is there a COMMAND to be obeyed?
- S – Is there a STUMBLING BLOCK or hindrance to be avoided?

- 4. Approach the Bible with eager expectation.** Why do we check our email often? Why do we jump on social media? Because we believe there is something we don't want to miss. Here's an idea. Instead of checking Facebook when you wake up, put your face in God's book before you do anything else. Are you eager to hear from God? Then take advantage of opportunities to go deeper in God's Word through the Grandparenting Summit or a weekend Growth Group. We're offering some new electives this month – *Sharing Your Faith with Confidence, This is the Day, The Smart Step Family, and A Biblical Guide to Investing*. Also, during the week we have Bible studies for men, women, students, and young adults. We're also kicking of a new group for young married couples.
- 5. Keep your guard up so you can spot error.** We need to know the truth of the Bible if we're ever going to spot error. I'm told when bank tellers are trained to recognize counterfeit money, they simply are given genuine money and told to familiarize themselves with how it looks, how it feels, and

how it smells. That way, when counterfeit cash shows up, they can spot it quickly.

As an example of how insidious error is, here are 10 common Christian cliches which are not found in the Bible:

- “*God helps those who help themselves.*” God helps those who CAN’T help themselves.
- “*Everyone is God’s child.*” Only those who are born again are in God’s family.
- “*God won’t give you more than you can handle.*” He won’t give you more than HE can handle.
- “*God wants you to achieve all your dreams.*” Life is not about you.
- “*God wants you to be happy.*” He wants you to be holy.
- “*Heaven gained another angel.*” Humans don’t become angels.
- “*This too shall pass.*” Maybe not.
- “*Follow your heart.*” Your heart is deceitful and fickle.
- “*The devil made me do it.*” No, you chose to do it.
- “*Cleanliness is next to godliness.*” Sorry, moms.

6. **Make sure the Bible is your final authority.** If you ever hear yourself say, “*I know what the Bible says, but...*” you should immediately repent. Instead, each of us should be saying something like this, “*I know what the Bible says, so I will gather with God’s people, I will do what it takes to grow, I will give what God has given to me, and I will go with the gospel, all for the glory of God.*”

Let me circle back to the American Worldview Inventory. This study revealed the most common worldview among Americans is syncretism, which is a collection of disparate worldview elements commonly called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Here are some of the common core beliefs in this spiritual smorgasbord:

- God is distant from people’s lives.
- People are supposed to be good to each other.
- The purpose of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself.
- There are no absolute moral truths.
- Good people go to Heaven.
- God places very limited demands on people.

Is there any error growing in the soil of your soul? I'm challenged by something Steven Cole said in a sermon from this passage.

Many have a false idea that there are two optional tracks in the Christian life. One track is the committed discipleship track. This track is for gung-ho types who...give up the comforts of life, they live without many of the gadgets and toys that the rest of us enjoy, they give large portions of their income to the cause of Christ, and they devote themselves and their time totally to Jesus.

If that track is a bit much for you, then you can choose the comfortable Christian track. Comfortable Christians usually go to church on [weekends], unless one of their hobbies has a big event that day. They give a bit to help out the church. They volunteer some of their time to the cause when time permits. For them, Christ, and the church...make life more pleasant. But Christ and the church aren't the center of life, touching every area. These folks wouldn't think of being inconvenienced for the sake of the gospel. But I never find Jesus offering this second track to any of His followers.

But notice how much the Lord can accomplish with just a few committed followers! Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy were just four men traveling in an almost completely pagan world. They left behind fledgling churches that were decisively in the minority. And yet they upset the entire world for Jesus Christ!

That reminds me of the child who was asked to come up front in a church service and recite the books in the Bible. She did great, until she came to the last book and called it "Revolutions." There's some truth to her mistake, isn't there? Jesus is the ultimate revolutionary, and He calls you and I to turn our world upside down for Christ.

To turn the world upside down, the Word must first turn us inside out.

Let's commit to do that by...

- Explaining the Word.
- Examining the Word.

In 1961, 25 students drew up a Christian manifesto for world evangelism. In part they wrote:

Literal adherence to the principles laid down by Jesus Christ would, without a doubt, result in worldwide revolution—a revolution motivated by love, a revolution executed by love, and a revolution culminating in love!

And we are revolutionaries! We are only a small group of Christian young people...yet we have determined by God's grace to live our lives according to the revolutionary teachings of our Master. Within the sphere of absolute, literal obedience to his commands lies the power that will evangelize the world. Outside this sphere is the nauseating, insipid Christianity of our day.

We have committed ourselves in reckless abandonment to the claims of Christ on our blood-bought lives. We have no rights! Every petty, personal desire must be subordinated to the supreme task of reaching the world for Christ. We are debtors. We must not allow ourselves to be swept into the soul-binding curse of modern-day materialistic thinking and living. Christians have been "willing" long enough to forsake all—the time has come (and is passing) when we must forsake all!

Christ must have absolute control of our time and money. We must yield possessions, comforts, food, and sleep; we must live on the barest essentials, that his cause might be furthered. The propagation of the faith we hold supreme! Christ is worthy of our all! We must be ready to suffer for Him and count it joy, to die for Him and count it gain. In the light of the present spiritual warfare, anything less than absolute dedication must be considered insubordination to our Master and mockery of his cause!

*This is our commitment, and we will press forward until every person has heard the gospel. We will soon be in many different countries, engaged in combat with all the forces of darkness. We look beyond the thousands to the millions, beyond the cities to the countries. The world is our goal! And our primary targets are the seemingly impenetrable areas of the Communist and Moslem countries which can only receive freedom as they have opportunity to receive the Truth. These countries will be reached for Christ no matter what the cost. The ultimate victory is ours! (George Verwer, *Come! Live! Die!* [Tyndale House], pp. 14-16.)*

This commitment became the bedrock belief of Operation Mobilization, founded 60 years ago by a Moody grad named George Verwer. OM now has more than 5,000 workers, representing more than 100 nationalities, taking God's unchanging truth to literally millions every year.

Speaking of missionaries who are turning the world upside down, it's our privilege today to welcome Fishers of Men and Joshua Ngao, our newest Go Team partner. Pastor Dan will interview him now.

Interview with Joshua Ngao