

1 Confronting the Culture

Acts 17:16-34

2 Paul in Athens

- While waiting in Athens, Paul is deeply grieved by the level of idolatry present in the city.
- He teaches and preaches anywhere people will listen: in the synagogues to the Jews, in the pagan temples to the philosophers, and in the streets to the common man.
- He is eventually taken to the Areopagus, the center of Athenian law and culture, to tell them about this “new thing.”

3 Paul in Athens

- Ironically, it was actually illegal to preach a foreign deity in Athens, making Paul’s invitation to the Areopagus both a guest lecture and a trial.
- The sermon on the Areopagus is actually the most complete one of Paul’s sermons that we have recorded in the book of Acts.

4 Confronting the Culture

- When faced with evil, wickedness, idolatry, and error, the Church has traditionally responded in one of three ways – these are the same three ways in which we can respond today:
 - We can choose to Conform
 - We can Cloister ourselves
 - We can Confront the Culture

5 1. Conform

6 Conform

- Of the three, this is the option that most of the church chooses.
- In essence it says that the differences in morals between the Church and the World are merely cultural differences, and it seeks to bridge the gap between the two by adopting a similar cultural model to that of the world.

7 Conform

- The primary problem with this line of thinking is that it violates one of the direct commands of Scripture:
 - *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Rom 12:2)

8 Be not conformed

- This verse has some important implications:
 - First, we are commanded not to be conformed by our culture, but rather to be transformed by the Word of God.
 - It also acknowledges that it is difficult to know what things are “good and acceptable and perfect,” which is why it is so critical that we have our minds transformed.

9 What transforms our minds?

- ▶ *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2Co 3:17-18)*

10 Freedom

- ▶ One of the distinguishing factors that a standard, a belief, a conviction, a moral is from God is that it results in freedom.
 - This is not always freedom to do what we please: that is not really freedom.
 - This freedom does mean that there is a lack of those things which enslave, addict, or control.

11 Behold the glory

- ▶ The Bible tells us that there are three ways in which God's glory has been revealed in the world around us:
 - General revelation (in creation)
 - The earthly coming and ministry of Jesus Christ
 - Special revelation (the Word of God) – this is the most valuable and the most glorious.

12 A more sure Word

- ▶ *For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, (2Pe 1:17-19)*

13 A more sure Word

- ▶ *...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2Pe 1:20-21)*

14 Transform your mind

- ▶ The mind of the believer is most surely and most effectively transformed to become like Christ when it is constantly immersed in and exposed to the Word of God.
- ▶ It is then, by the Spirit of God, that we will be able to know which things will bring us into bondage, and which things represent a conformity with the culture.

15 Epicureanism

- ▶ This option – the option of conforming to the world around you – was very similar to the philosophy of Epicureanism, one of the false philosophies against which Paul spoke.
- ▶ Epicureanism taught that true happiness could only be attained via “going with the flow” and living as moderately as possible until evil ceased to bother you.

16 2. Cloister

17  **Cloister**

- One of the most common responses of the early church, when confronted with the wickedness of the world around them, was to cloister themselves away from it.
- This eventually led to the heresy of monasticism – the belief that godly living could be accomplished by complete isolation from the world.

18  **Cloister**

- To cloister ourselves away from the world so that it cannot hurt us is directly opposed to the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments:
- *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* (Gen 1:28)

19  **Cloister**

- *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves..."* (Mat 10:16)
- It is this desire to retreat from the world that has resulted in the church ceding almost every form of media and entertainment to the world.

20  **Entertainment**

- We are past the point where telling our children that fiction is a waste of their time and energies is a viable option.
- Instead, we need to teach them to refine their tastes and ultimately to become creators and artists.

21  **Entertainment**

- Entertainment has the ability to change people in ways that other forms of communication don't, because people will let their guards down for it.
- The world needs more truly good fiction.
- The act of creating good fiction is as much an act of worship as preaching a sermon or pursuing a vocation well.

22  **Stoicism**

- This second reaction – to cloister ourselves away from the world in the pursuit of moral purity – is very similar to stoicism.
- Stoicism is the second philosophy mentioned that Paul confronted.
- It teaches inner peace through becoming a sage – a person of moral and intellectual perfection.

23  **Stoicism**

- Stoicism assumes that evil is going to happen and there is simply nothing that we can do to change that fact.
- Instead, it elevates the pursuit of knowledge above all others and teaches a graceless form of moral uprightness.
- This is remarkably similar to how some churches/Christians handle the world around them.