

## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

**COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH**  
COUNTER CULTURE  
CULTURE  
ACTS 17:22-34  
10/15/2017



### MAIN POINT

These days in our culture require authentic zeal, and real passion for God.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**On what social issue are you most likely to be courageous, outspoken, and active? Why?**

**On what social issues are you most likely to remain silent, uncertain, or inactive? Why?**

In a rapidly shifting cultural landscape, it is tempting to only take a stand for those issues which those around us also take a stand for. Our supposed social justice quickly becomes a selective social injustice. Zeal for the glory of God does not allow us to pick and choose what we stand for and does not allow us to be silent on those things which God condemns. The same gospel that compels us to speak about marital fidelity compels us to speak about sexual purity. The same gospel compels us to speak about sex trafficking and all forms of sexual immorality, poverty and abortion. These issues should provoke our holy anger, and we cannot remain be silent.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:16-21.**

**What happened to Paul when he saw the culture around him in Athens? How did he respond? When have you experienced a similar feeling?**

**When is it right to be angry? How can you tell if your anger is righteous anger?**

**What made the speakers want to hear more from Paul? How does taking a contrite, courageous, and compassionate stand make people curious about what we have to say?**

**Was Paul afraid of sounding strange to the people of Athens? What about the gospel message is strange to unbelievers?**

When Paul saw the city of Athens was full of idols, his spirit was provoked within him. The glory of God being mocked by the city of idols was more than Paul could take. His zeal for the glory of God would not allow him to be silent. Paul went from synagogues to the market place to talk to people and tell others about the glory of God. So strange was the gospel message to a few of the philosophers that they asked Paul to come explain his strange beliefs at the Areopagus. When our culture dishonors the glory of God, our zeal for God compels us to act.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:22-31.**

**What titles of God do we see in Paul's message at the Areopagus?**

**How did Paul use the culture around him to make a bridge into the gospel message? What are some bridges in your culture to the gospel?**

**Trace the 5 essential threads of the gospel in Paul's sermon. What are they and where do you see each thread?**

**Which part of the gospel do you have the most difficulty talking about or explaining? How could you better prepare yourself to proclaim this part of God's message?**

Taking cues from the Athenian culture, Paul made a bridge to the gospel. He explained how God is the creator, sustainer, ruler, savior, Father, king, and judge of the whole world, and methodically shared the gospel message. Many commentators have called this a sermon, but it is more like Paul being a Christian explaining His beliefs, something each and every Christian should be able to do. Paul spoke the gospel clearly. We have the same opportunity each and every day.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:32-34.**

**What variety of responses do you notice in these verses?**

**Read Romans 1:16. What unique power does the gospel message have? Why should we continue to share the gospel every chance we get?**

When Paul was finished speaking, there was no wide spread revival that broke out in the city of Athens. Some mocked Paul, some asked questions, but some believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved. All God asks is for us to be obedient and speak the gospel whenever we have the opportunity to do so. Only time and eternity can will tell what God can and will do with faithful gospel witness.

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Which culture issues incite your holy anger? Which issues should incite your holy anger, but do not?**

**How do we begin to, like Paul, to view all cultural issues through the lens of zeal for the glory of God?**

**Do you know the gospel well enough to speak it to another person? Practice sharing the gospel using the following threads: the character of God, the sinfulness of men, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity.**

## PRAY

Pray for God to make you zealous for His glory and passionate for people's salvation. Ask for God to give you eyes to see your culture with His eyes. Pray for a bold and courageous spirit to speak the gospel to any who will listen.

## COMMENTARY

### ACTS 17:16-34.

Paul and his fellow missionaries traveled to Thessalonica where he followed his usual pattern of beginning his witness in the synagogue. After preaching there, opposition developed; and Paul had to abandon his synagogue witness. Many believed, however, (17:1-4). Eventually Jewish opponents stirred up a riot against Paul and Silas, and they went to Berea, 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica. Paul found the synagogue there more receptive to his teaching and led the people in serious Bible study. Jews eventually came from Thessalonica and incited crowds in Berea against Paul. Paul fled to Athens in the southern Greek province of Achaia (17:10-15).

In Athens Paul encountered all sorts of people from many religious backgrounds. Athens was the intellectual center of the Roman empire, filled with teachers and students of every persuasion. Paul was especially upset by the many idols throughout the city. It was filled with temples and shrines, lavishly decorated with images of the gods.

Paul was disgusted by the idolatry. It was a testimony to the polytheistic error of Greek religion. They worshiped the many gods of Olympus rather than the one true God. In Athens Paul preached in the synagogue on Sabbaths and on weekdays to whoever passed by in the marketplace. The Greek philosophers were curious about the new message Paul was preaching. The philosophers led Paul to a meeting of the Areopagus.

Paul began by seeking to win the good will of his audience and sought to gain attention by introducing something thoroughly familiar to the Athenians: the altar to an unknown god. The idol Paul referred to was a particularly blatant example of the religiosity of the Athenians. They had room for all the gods, known or unknown. Paul seized his opportunity to introduce them to the one true God. He proclaimed to them the God they did not know was the only One that counts, the only One that exists. In speaking of their ignorance of this God, Paul was striking at the very self-identity of the philosophers.

Although Paul confined himself to clear Bible teachings, he presented them in a manner that would have been understood by the Athenians. Paul first presented God as Creator. Stoics were pantheistic. They did not believe in a divine Creator. He drew a further conclusion that the Creator of all that exists needs nothing from His creation such as idols or any other external form of human piety.

Paul's first teaching focused on God's distance from us; the second emphasized His nearness. Paul argued that we turn things upside down when we worship idols. Idolatry fashions God after earthly likenesses. That leads to worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. We are truly God's image when we know Him through faith in Christ and reflect Him in our lives, living so as to point beyond ourselves to God.

The Athenians' idolatry was a sign of their sinfulness Paul proceeded to the next step: he called on his hearers to repent, to turn from their sins to God. God had overlooked their sins of ignorance in the sense that He had not brought to them the judgment they deserved. He had instead sent the gospel to them. God now commanded them to repent. If we fail to repent in light of the gospel, only judgment remains for us.

Paul's address was cut short by mockers who found the idea of Jesus' resurrection to be foolish. (See 1 Cor. 1:23-24.) A second group were unconvinced, but still open. They wanted to hear more. But the third group believed.