**Rejecters and Joiners**

by Edwin Crozier

In **Acts 17**, Paul is taken to the Areopagus. Please do not have the “Oh, what a great opportunity. Folks have heard Paul and now they have invited him to speak to a bigger audience and consider what he is saying” idea about this. Certainly, any time we get to proclaim the gospel, it is a great opportunity. In this instance, however, we need to understand Paul is not being invited to a bigger audience for broader transmission. He is being dragged to the Athenian Council to defend himself.

The Areopagus does not simply refer to the location where Paul was now speaking, but to the Athenian Council that met there to consider new teachings and to rule on them. Notice in **Acts 17:22**, Paul is standing in the midst of the Areopagus, but when he leaves in **Acts 17:33**, he went out of “their midst.” Additionally, the term translated “took” in **Acts 17: 19** (ESV), as seen in nearby contexts can mean to seize (**Acts 16:19; 18:17; 21:30**) and even arrest (**21:33**). Finally, the accusation made in **Acts 17:18**, that Paul is a preacher of foreign deities, is the same accusation that caused the Athenians to execute Socrates.

As Paul is preaching to the Areopagus, his life is on the line. This Council might judge his teaching of strange deities as an executable offense. This is likely why Paul starts off by explaining he isn’t teaching a strange deity at all. Rather, he is teaching about the God the Athenians themselves honored, but didn’t know.

Paul’s brief sermon is certainly a masterpiece of contextualizing the gospel for the culture he is addressing. It is a wonderful example of how to teach those who aren’t familiar with Scripture. However, despite this masterful example of teaching, notice the responses. Though Paul was not judged worthy of death and was simply allowed to walk out of their midst, he didn’t turn Athens around from their polytheistic idolatry.

Though apparently convinced he wasn’t teaching strange deities, when they heard about resurrection, they were not convinced. In fact, some mocked (**Acts 17:32**). They simply could not accept this idea of resurrection. Nobody ever came back from the dead and anyone who thinks someone did is foolish. Isn’t that exactly what we hear today? “You Christians are foolishly gullible if you think Jesus was raised from the dead.” There is no need to be surprised at this response today; it’s been given for nearly 2000 years.

But notice the two other groups. Some wanted to hear more. They weren’t sold after the first hearing, but they weren’t completely dismissive either. Don’t be surprised when we meet folks with this response today. They won’t believe on the first hearing, but they are intrigued and want to hear more. Be ready to give them more. However, then there is the last group. Some actually believed Paul and joined with him. Don’t be surprised when we meet these folks. That’s right, don’t be surprised. Sadly, sometimes we are so convinced no one will respond to the gospel, we almost act like it is a shock when someone does. Don’t be surprised, some people really will hear and heed the gospel message.

Paul left Athens and he kept on teaching wherever he went. Why was he able to do that? I can assure you it is because he spent less time thinking about the rejecters and more time thinking about the joiners. Teach the gospel. There will be joiners. We just need to find them. I can assure you this, nobody will join unless we teach.