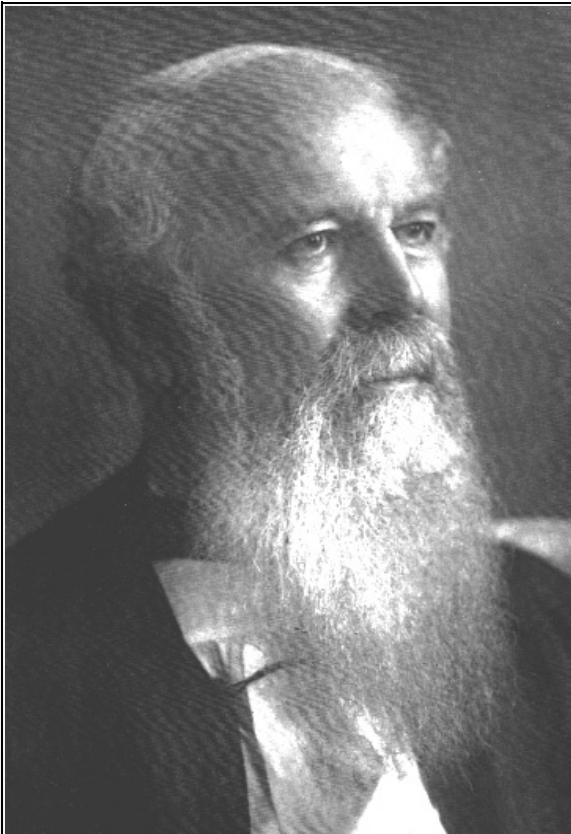


# Opposition & Opportunity



**JOHN CHARLES RYLE (1816-1900)**  
"God separated the nations in the day of Babel.  
Man is working hard to make them all one  
again."  
-- *Coming Events and Present Duties* (1867)

## The GOSPEL for the GREEKS

... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence, either to the Jews or to the Greeks ...

1 Corinthians 10:31,32

### Study 17a: UNAVOIDABLE OFFENCE (17:1-15)

#### 17:1-3 Is Paul attempting something different in Thessalonica?

The fact is, the Jewish synagogue for the first century of the Christian era was much more open than many Christian churches today. When teachers came from distant places, they were recognized and accorded an opportunity to present their views, and Paul always took advantage of this in order that he might bring the gospel message to his own brethren after the flesh first. **Harry Ironside** *Acts* p.392

By 'reasoned' is meant *debated*, or *argued*, from which comes our word *dialectic*, the investigation of truth by argument. **W. Graham Scroggie** *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* Vol.2 p.374

#### 17:4-9 How do even unbelievers pay tribute to the gospel?

When Christians are asleep the devil is quiet, but when they are awake he becomes active. **W. G. Scroggie** *op.cit.* p.376

#### 17:10-15 Will New Testament witness suffice to convince those who 'receive the word with all readiness'? (cf. vv.2,3)

(Day) by day, . denoting not mere occasional but constant and assiduous investigation.. -- **J.A. Alexander**, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.141

### Study 17b: PAUL in ATHENS (17:16-34)

#### 17:16-21 What reveals Epicurean, Stoic & other Greek religions and philosophies left their adherents dissatisfied?

Luke places before us the man who became "all things to all men," and who therefore in Athens made himself like an Athenian and adopted the regular Socratic style of general free discussion in agora ... **W.M. Ramsay**, *St.Paul* p.237

The facility with which the great Apostle of the Gentiles here adopts peculiar national and local habits, for the sake of reaching the Athenian mind, is one of the most striking illustrations and examples of the holy art, with which he ever stood prepared to become "all to all," that he might "by all means save some" ( Cor 9:22) -- **J.A. Alexander**, *op.cit.*, p.146

#### 17:22-23 Despite his inward provocation (v.16), how does heavenly wisdom control Paul? (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

He certainly did not say what [the KJV] makes him say ... Had he begun his discourse by declaring, '... you are too superstitious,' he would probably have closed the door of their minds effectually against his message. **Harry Ironside** *op.cit.* p.399

*Superstitious*, literally, *god-fearing*, or more exactly, *demon-fearing* (see above, on v.18), a word used by the classical Greek writers, both in the good sense of *religious* or *devout*, and in the bad sense of *superstitious*, i.e. slavishly afraid of the divine wrath. This equivocal expression seems to be deliberately chosen here, as justly descriptive of the Athenians, and yet not liable to shock their vanity or

### REVIEWING THE LAST STUDY:

1. Must Christians *always* agree?
2. Explain the circumcision of Timothy
3. Who gave Paul his European assignment?
4. Which 3 missionaries become prominent in Acts 16?
5. By what unspectacular means does the Spirit lead the church?

prepossessions in the very outset of this great discourse. A multitude of passages has been collected from the ancient writers, which agree with this in representing the Athenians as the most religious (in their way) of all the Greeks, and indeed of all the ancient heathen. Of this distinction they were naturally proud, and Paul avails himself of that well-known feeling to secure attention and conciliate his hearers. This end, however, would have been defeated by directly and explicitly denouncing them as superstitious in the very first sentence that he uttered. -- **J.A. Alexander**, *op. cit.*, p.151

Paul might have condemned them for their excessive idolatry. This was proverbial, and one writer of antiquity said, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." Or Paul might have taken an Old Testament text against idolatry. Those who criticize his approach at Athens probably would have done so. But Paul wanted to hold the audience at least until he had gotten his central point across to them. -- **W.S. LaSor**, *Church Alive* p.272

So far was Paul from inveighing against the objects of Athenian veneration that he expressly commended the religious feelings of the people, and identified the God whom he had come to preach with the god whom they were blindly worshipping. He did not rebuke or check their religious ideas ... -- **W.M. Ramsay**, *op.cit.*, p.146

### **17:24,25 How does Paul, like Stephen, use his setting?**

It is somewhat singular that this same sentiment is uttered by Lucretius, the Epicurean poet, and by Seneca, the Stoic moralist. But in flagrant contradiction to these speculative doctrines was the whole religious practise, of philosophers as well as of the multitude, implying the necessity of human service to the divine blessedness. -- **J.A. Alexander**, *op. cit.*, p.154

In what follows, Paul appeals to the truth contained in Stoic pantheism. His words are of peculiar interest at the present day, when pantheism is rampant even within the Church. There is a great truth in pantheism. It emphasizes the immanence of God. But the truth of pantheism is contained also in theism. -- **J. Gresham Machen**, *The New Testament* p.110

### **17:26-29 What common ground does Paul utilize?**

With respect, not only to the local pride of the Athenians, as *autochthones* or *aborigines*, distinct from other races and the

offspring of their own soil, but also to the general connection between the belief in many gods and that in many races, Paul here asserts the original unity of men, as the creatures of the same God and subjects of the same providential government. -- **J.A. Alexander**, *op. cit.*, p.155

We would do well to notice the varied approaches that are presented in Acts. In just about every situation the evangelizer begins where the hearer is. The question, "Are you saved?" is not used once. -- **W.S. LaSor**, *op.cit.*, p.124

Paul's teaching thus was introduced to his pagan audiences in the language of the purest and simplest theology current among educated men. He started from those thoughts which were familiar to all who had imbibed even the elements of Greek education. But even in the more advanced stage of his teaching he did not cut it off from the philosophy of the time. He never adopted that attitude of antagonism to philosophy which became customary in the second century, springing from the changed circumstances of that period. -- **W.M. Ramsay**, *op. cit.*, p.148

He presented an Old Testament picture of God without directly referring to the Old Testament. In this context, Paul did not use the authoritative Word of God *directly* as it was not understood yet to be *the* Word of authority by the Greeks. -- **Ronald B. Mayers**, *Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic* p.166

### **17:30-31 Although adapted with consummate skill to local circumstance, what goal does the Areopagus address share with other speeches in Acts? (2:36-38; 3:17-19; 7:51-54; 10:42,43; 13:38-41; 14:15,16)**

Idolatry must be abandoned. Paul gives a solemn reason for repentance -- the day of judgment. The proof of such a day is the resurrection of the man who is to make the awards. He calls the judge a man, that they may no more think that Paul is a setter forth of strange gods, a man, because that term fits the announcement of the resurrection. -- **James Stifler**, *Acts* p.171

## **Study 17c: DID PAUL FAIL in ATHENS? (17:32-34)**

### **17:32-34 Some expositors and preachers have declared Paul's Athenian approach a compromise of the gospel, based on the words Paul wrote the Corinthians regarding his attitude and approach to them upon arriving in Corinth from Athens (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Comment on Luke's assessment of Paul's adventure in Athens.**

It is remarkable that, alike at Lystra and Athens, there is nothing in the reported words of Paul that is overtly Christian, and nothing (with the possible exception of "the man whom he hath ordained") that several Greek philosophers might not have said. -- **W.M. Ramsay**, *op.cit.*, p.150

The Apostle showed his wisdom, in addressing such an audience, by setting out from principles of natural religion, and gradually introducing the distinctive doctrines of the Gospel, as he begins to do in this verse.

That he did not fully carry out his plan, was the fault of his hearers, not his own ... As if to make up for the fewness of the converts in this famous city, one of them was chosen from among the judges of the Areopagus itself, the most august tribunal of the ancient world. -- **J.A. Alexander**, *op.cit.*, pp.160-162

The speech of Paul at Athens is one of the three important speeches of Paul, exclusive of his speeches in defence of himself at Jerusalem and at Caesarea, which have been recorded in The Acts. These speeches are well chosen. One of them is a speech to Jews, Acts 13:16-41; one is a speech to Gentiles, Acts 17:22-31; and the third a speech to Christians, Acts 20:18-35. Together they afford a very good idea of Paul's method as a missionary and as a pastor. As is to be expected, they differ strikingly from one another. Paul was large enough to comprehend the wonderful richness of Christian truth. His gospel was always the same, but he was able to adapt the presentation of it to the character of his hearers. -- **J. Gresham Machen**, *op.cit.*, p.109

