

# HOW TO TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series from  
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## Let's Begin

*Do you ever feel like your church is ineffective? What about your personal life? Do you sometimes feel your Christian walk makes little difference in your community, your workplace, and especially the world?*

*Today's lesson focuses on how to impact the world around you with the Gospel of Jesus. The book of Acts describes the work of Paul and his party as turning the world upside down!*

*As we explore chapter 17, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. Exalting the Savior (vv. 1-9)**
- II. Examining the Scriptures (vv. 10-15)**
- III. Engaging the Skeptics (vv. 16-34)**

## I. Exalting the Savior (vv. 1-9)

Paul continues his second missionary journey, with three cities being the ministry hot-spots — Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. The Ignatian Way connected the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. On this route was Thessalonica. Paul planned to build a strong church in this thriving metropolis.

The first thing Paul did was engage the Jews (v. 2). As a result, an uproar ensued ending in a riot (vv. 5-6). The charge brought against Paul and his companions was the charge that has been brought against every Spirit-anointed church in history, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (v. 6). The world always sees Christians as those who turn things upside down.

In one sense, however, it really depends on one's perspective. For the fact is, the devil had done that a long, long time ago. What Paul was doing was just turning things right side up. That always happens when Jesus is preached and when lives are changed. Nevertheless, the description the men gave sticks: turning the world upside down for Jesus.

If we want to turn our world upside down today, there are three things we need to do. *First, we must exemplify the Savior, the Lord Jesus.* Paul preached, “this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (v. 3).

Paul was exemplifying Jesus, doing the kinds of things Jesus did (Luke 4:16). Now there is never salvation by simply trying to live up to the example of Jesus. We are not saved by doing what Jesus did but by receiving who Jesus is. Nevertheless, you and I, day by day, must exemplify the Savior. We exemplify the Savior in worship and in walk. If we talk the talk, we must walk the walk.

*Second, we exalt the Savior by extending salvation to other people.* The story of salvation belongs to the world, not the church. The apostle Paul said elsewhere, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Rom. 1:14-15).

Paul viewed himself as a man in debt. He owed to the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ came into the world to save sinners — all

### Reflection Connection

*If your church could be described by the leaders in your community, how do you think they would describe it? Do you think your church is known for “turning the world upside down”? Why or why not?*



### Reflection Connection

*Reflect upon the way your church does missions. Is there a sense of obligation to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth? Why or why not?*

sinner — our obligation does not end until the Gospel has been delivered to the last person. The church owes the world what God has deposited into their account. We exalt the Savior when we invite people to Jesus. Thus, the story of the Gospel is a *shared* story.

The Gospel story is also a *simple* story. When Paul preached at Thessalonica, Luke records the results, “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few” (v. 4). Some of them *believed*. The story of the Gospel is the story of belief, simple faith in the Lord Jesus.

Finally the story of the Gospel is the *sequel* to salvation. It is one salvation story after the next throughout history (cp. 1 Thess. 1:9). It is telling what God did, what He is doing and what He will do because of the cross of Jesus Christ.

## II. Examining the Scriptures (vv. 10-15)

If we want to turn our world upside down, not only do we *exalt the Savior*, but we must *examine the Scriptures*. As we have observed, Paul’s practice anchored itself to the Bible. In Thessalonica, for three sabbaths he, “reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging...” (vv. 2-3). Paul never took shortcuts with the Word of God. Nor should we. Whatever it took to “reason” with the Jews concerning the Messiah, Paul took the time to do. Notice the three words — “reasoned,” “opening,” and “alleging.” These three words explain to us how Paul shared the Scriptures correctly as he taught in the synagogue.

The word “reasoned” means *explanation*. Paul explained the meaning of the Scriptures; he told them what the Bible had to say. The second word is the word “opened.” The first word means *explanation*; the second word means *interpretation*. That is, he *interpreted* what the Word of God had to say.

The third word is the word “alleging.” Literally, that word means to “lay along side of,” and that means a *practical application* of the Scriptures. He was explaining what the Bible said, what the Bible meant by what it said, and then taking what the Bible said and laying it alongside the lives of individuals, making practical application into their lives.

Andy Holt, former president of the University of Tennessee, once said, “Reading the Bible cured me of my ulcers.” What he meant was, he began to read the Scriptures daily and found out what the Scriptures had to say. As he applied the truths of the Scripture to his life, he began to see attitudes, bitterness, and rebellion in his heart that ought not to be there. He began to change, and so by reading the Scriptures, he woke up one day and his ulcers were cured!

In the 15th century, the Bibles were chained to the pulpits in the churches and the common people were not allowed to have a copy of the Word of God. God used a man named Martin Luther to make a revolutionary change. Consequently,

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the Bible was placed in the hands of the common people, freeing the world from the Dark Ages.

One night John Wesley walked into a little chapel in England and heard the reading of Luther's preface to the book of Romans. He said as he heard the Word of God being explained, he found his heart "strangely warmed." Wesley had already preached all over England and in America as well.

After that, life changed for Wesley. He began to explain, expound, and proclaim the Bible. He was banned from the churches, yet he was undaunted. What did he do? He started preaching in the open air, a phenomenon unheard of in those days. Thousands of people came to hear him preach and literally thousands were saved through the preaching of the Word of God. Explaining the Scriptures will turn a world upside down for Jesus.

### Reflection Connection

*Reflect upon the way you proceed in your daily devotions. Is the focus upon the Scripture? What can you do to assure the Bible remains the centerpiece of your devotional life?*

From Thessalonica Paul journeyed to Berea. While Thessalonica was on the main thoroughfare, Berea was off the beaten path. Living outside the metropolis did not hinder the Bereans' love for Scripture, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (v. 11). The love they possessed for the Word of God excited the Apostle Paul! Their love for Biblical truth revealed a two-fold responsibility Christians have concerning the Bible.

*First, we have a public responsibility to receive the Word.* The Bereans, "received the word with all readiness of mind." Note the phrase "readiness of mind." The Bereans were *convicted* by Biblical truth (cp. 1 Thess. 2:13). The words were not simply the words of men; instead the spoken words were the words of God. Timeless words were received in faith (cp. Heb. 4:2).

Also, the Bereans *submitted* to Biblical truth (cp. James 1:21). Submission means a teachable spirit, a willingness to face the truth without anger or resentment even when it hurts. The Bereans were *observant* of Biblical truth. They were alert and eager for heaven's spiritual food.

Does the Word of God convict you of sin, turning a searchlight upon your soul? The fact is, one cannot continue in sin and genuinely listen to the Word of God. The reason is simple — *the Bible convicts*. The Bible also *cleanses* our life. Just as our physical bodies need routine bathing so our spiritual souls need bathing as well. The Word cleanses our life (cp. Psa. 119:9; John 15:3).

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*Second, we have a private responsibility to search the Word.* After Paul preached, the Bereans went home and examined the Bible to test the words the apostle spoke, searching the Scriptures daily to see "whether those things were so." Observe: their quest was a *daily* quest. Every person has a right and responsibility to read the Bible for himself or herself. Educated or not, rich or poor, male or female, makes no difference when it comes to the truth of Scripture.



Their quest was also a *diligent* quest; that is, they *searched* the Scripture. The term “searched” means “to examine” or “to sift” the evidence.

Furthermore, their quest was a *discerning* quest. They searched to see whether “those things were so” (cp. John 5:39). Their purpose was to test the teaching of men against the backdrop of the truth of God. The church that turns the world upside down will be a church which *exalts* the Savior and *examines* the Scripture.

### III. Engaging the Skeptics (vv. 16-34)

Paul traveled from Thessalonica to Berea, exalting Jesus and expounding on the Word. Then he arrived in Athens, Greece. Athens was the cultural capital of the ancient world. Its literature, sculpture, and oratory stood unsurpassed. Athens was also the academic hub of renowned learning. As Paul entered the city, he could see the Parthenon, the most beautiful temple in the world, glowing like a crown atop the Acropolis.

Walking the streets, Paul observed statues and images lining the walkways. One Greek said, “In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man.” Luke captured Paul’s first impression as he assessed the city, “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” (v. 16). He wasted no time, going directly to the marketplace, he took up a conversation about the Messiah with the Jews (v. 17).

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The intense dialogue drew the interest of several philosophers, representing two popular schools in Athens: Epicurean and Stoic (v. 18). The Epicureans sought above all else a fulfillment of pleasure. Pleasure was their highest value. Sounds kind of familiar, doesn’t it? As for the Stoics, they sought emotionless existence, a passive approach to a life given totally to fate.

Noting Paul’s debating skills and deep learning, the philosophers accompanied Paul to the famous Areopagus, to test the truth of his claim about some man named Jesus arising from the dead (v. 18).

Paul and his party turned the world upside down. They did so by exalting Jesus and expounding Scripture. However, that’s not all. The Gospel is designed to engage *the world*. And the world is filled with skeptics, unbelievers who will challenge the truth of Scripture.

As the Apostle Paul stood before the skeptics, he preached a message concerning the “unknown god” (v. 23). His message reveals *three themes* by which we engage a skeptical age.

*First, Paul challenged the skeptics with creation* (vv. 24-27). God is the *source* of creation. He made “the world and all things therein.” How do you account for the universe? How do you account for yourself? The Athenians said man sprang from the soil of Attica. Multitudes today believe the universe came about by a colossal chance-induced accident. No accident, however, is adequate to explain the existence of the universe. The “unknown god” who is “Lord of heaven and earth” is the one true and living God to Whom a skeptical age must surrender.

#### Reflection Connection

*Do you feel prepared to defend the Christian faith? Why or why not? Make a list of the skills you lack. Be prepared to share with the entire group.*



*Second, Paul challenged the skeptics with the incarnation (vv. 28-30).* Luke writes, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (v. 28). In a stroke of genius, Paul quoted a popular Athenian poet, “For we are also his offspring.” He used this line to lead the Athenians to consider God being born as man. Whether a person is educated or not, God becoming man remains central to Christian truth and true preaching of the Gospel. The deity of Jesus Christ always stands at the forefront of engagement with the world. Clever men design arguments to destroy Jesus’ deity.

*Third, Paul challenged the skeptics with the resurrection (vv. 31-34).* The God of creation is the God of redemption. The world put Jesus to death but the God of heaven raised Jesus to life. Paul ties *three truths* to His resurrection. The first truth is *retribution*. There will be a day of judgment “in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (v. 31). Men may laugh and even scoff. Nevertheless, one day judgment will come.

The second truth tied to the resurrection is *righteousness*. The standard of righteousness is Jesus Himself, “that man whom he hath ordained.” Our only hope is to have the righteousness of Christ imparted to us. God does this, we don’t. The instrument through which God gives us the righteousness of Christ is faith.

The third truth tied to the resurrection is *repentance*. Repentance is the only way to escape judgment (cp. Luke 13:3). A person can go to hell as easily from Athens as Sodom. Though Sodom was wicked and illiterate, their lack of repentance guaranteed the judgment of God. Neither culture, education, philosophy, nor art could save Athens. Only repentance toward God and faith in Jesus could.

### Golden Greek Nugget

While Paul was in Thessalonica, Luke describes his encounter with “lewd fellows of the baser sort” (v. 5). The Greek word for “lewd” is an adjective which means “vicious” or “degenerate.” Also, “of the baser sort” is one word in the Greek and it means “a lounge in the agora.” These men were common loiters, standing around the marketplace looking for something to do. And, because they were “vicious,” they were up to no good.

### Wrap Up

*Three necessities exist if the church is to turn the world upside down. We must exalt Jesus Christ. No church can make a difference in this world apart from lifting up Jesus. We also must expound and explain Scripture. God uses His Word as His catalyst for change. And, we must engage the world with the message we possess. In fact our engagement is the only hope this skeptical world possesses.*

