

Acts 17

How to speak so people will listen and how to listen so people will talk.

(Different audiences call for different methods of communication.)

Introduction:

- Ministry calls for sensitivity to our audience as well as to our message.
- Paul indicates that he was not only a sensitive speaker but also a good listener.
- We want to look at this chapter for wisdom in the way we speak and listen as well.
- People respond to those who disagree with them in one of four ways.

Passive withdrawal

Defensive (ego)

Hostile attack

Live and let live

Civil debate

- Paul's relationship with those who disagreed with him can be helpful for us in all relationships and especially with those whom we want to influence for Christ.

1. Using the Scripture with those who respect it.

"¹ Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned with them from the Scriptures**, ³ **explaining** and giving **evidence** that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and {saying,} "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." ⁴ And some of them were **persuaded** and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. ⁵ But the **Jews, becoming jealous** and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶ And when they did not find them, they {began} dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." ⁸ And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. ⁹ And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

- Paul believed in doctrine but not in indoctrination. He did not manipulate his audience emotionally, coerce them socially, or force them physically to believe. He "reasoned", "explained", "giving evidence" so that some of them were "persuaded."
- The death and resurrection of Jesus is the issue in Paul's message, not his ethics, or miracle power, or Kingdom principles.
- The jealousy of the Jews seems to be a theme in Acts.

- The charge of treason against Rome that was leveled against Paul was very serious and could have resulted in execution.

10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily, {to see} whether these things were so.** 12 Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

- It is interesting to note that Paul's teaching was not accepted without personal examination of the Scriptures. This did not threaten Paul in that he commends the Bereans for their examination of his teaching.
- Paul received resistance wherever he preached. His ministry was not easy.

2. Using other bases of authority with those who do not respect Scripture.

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols. 17 So he was **reasoning** in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing {Gentiles,} and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. 18 And also some of the **Epicurean** and **Stoic philosophers** were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? 20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean." 21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) 22 And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined {their} appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring. 29 "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some {began} to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." 33 So Paul went out of their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

- We could divide Paul's audience in Athens into four groups.

Religious Jews and God fearers	Street people	Epicureans	Stoics
They emphasized the Mosaic Law and the traditions of the fathers.	They were more commercially engaged and pragmatic.	They emphasized chance, escape and the enjoyment of pleasure.	They emphasized fatalism, submission and the endurance of pain.

- Note that Paul did not mention the great glory and beauty of Athens but rather he notices that it is "full of idols" (a veritable forest of idols). A Roman satirist put it this way, "it was easier to find a god there than a man."
- Paul's "spirit was being provoked within him". This is a strong expression that is used of God's feelings about idolatry in the Old Testament.
- "Areopagus" literally "Mars Hill" was the "court of culture" similar to a modern universities services, open to the community.
- Paul's speech in the Areopagus made five arguments.
 1. God is the Creator of the universe. Vs.24
 2. God is the Sustainer of all life. Vs.25
 3. God is the Ruler of all the nations. Vs.26-28a
 4. God is the Father of all human beings. Vs.28b-29
 5. God is the Judge of the world. Vs.30-31
- In this chapter, Paul preaches the Gospel in two different cultures. His method is distinct in each context. For the Jews he appeals to Scripture to make his presentation of Christ. For the Gentiles he appeals to their poets, their cultural institutions, and historical facts that they can appreciate.
- Characteristics of Paul's ministry.
 1. Paul's message centered on faith in historic facts (not ethical renewal, emotional experience, organizational affiliation).
 2. Paul used rational means of communication and debate.
 3. Paul did not attach his personal ego to people's response.
 4. Paul listened to his audience's culture.
 5. Idolatry got Paul's attention.
 6. Paul expressed respect for his audience.
 - Paul commends the positive aspects of his audience's heart.
 - Paul met his audience on their turf.
 - Paul appealed to authority that his listeners respected.
 7. Paul was patient with the communication process.

8. Paul appealed to a broad spectrum of God's dealing with His world.
9. Paul understood that the first step to changing someone's mind is to confuse it.

There is no virtue in this ----- with out this.

Clear understanding

Sensitive listening

Deep commitment

Rational dialogue

Passionate expression

Respectful relationships

How can I speak so people will listen?

- I must show respect.
- I must express concerns for their issues.
- I must listen to them before I speak.

How can I listen so people will speak?

- I must make it safe for them to be honest.
- I must be willing to share part of myself.
- I must give them feedback to indicate that I am understanding them.

Forgotten facts

1. Everyone is an expert on themselves so ask them to expound on the area of their expertise.
2. When we move toward another's soul with genuine interest we affirm them at a deep level. We all want others to know us (our longings, fears, joys, etc.) without rejecting us.
3. We generally do better at talking after we have listened than before.
4. We listen with our face.
5. Listening is an expression of love.
6. A fool can criticize. It takes a wise man to see the image of God in another.

Listening skills

Listen with your face. Maintain eye contact with people. "Body language" is a universally understood language.

Treat listening as an expression of love. The easiest way to communicate love is by listening well.

Give a person full attention. Let them know that what they are saying is being heard by you. Taking notes can be helpful.

Be slow to speak. It is hard to be quick to hear if you are not slow to speak. (Jas. 1:19)
Don't just wait to talk.

Listen for main ideas or feelings not just superficial details. What people want us to hear is their fears, hopes, longings, and joys. Listen for fears, hopes, longings, and joys between the lines of the ideas.

Ask questions and give feedback. Interact with people. Let the other person know that you are receiving their message by giving non-verbal and verbal feedback.

Five types of communication in our connection with others.

1. **Small talk** – How was your trip?
2. **Shop talk** – Did you follow up on the request I sent you?
3. **Seek talk** – What is it that most excites you about this decision?
4. **Share talk** – Do you want to know what really scares me?
5. **Steer talk** – I want you to memorize the five core values of this group?

Note: We develop relationships through “Seek” and “Share” talk. We must be willing to be emotionally vulnerable and be willing to make it safe for others to be emotionally vulnerable if we are to build trust and constructive movement to common understanding.

Five things that will tell a person not to talk to you more than once.

1. **I am always right.** I have made up my mind and there is nothing you can say that will change it.
2. **I will reject you if I don't agree with you.** I will reject you if I don't like what you say.
3. **My time is too valuable.** You are not worth my time.
4. **It's all about me.** I am more interested in being understood than in understanding.
5. **I will not let you know me.** I will not give you feedback or be vulnerable to you.