

## Communicating Persuasively in a Post-Christian World

What does it mean to love God and to love people as we engage and work in an increasingly hostile world? We have to be sure about what we communicate (content) and also the manner in which we present truth. In our social media world, this last issue is an important one for all leaders. We want our communication to be truthful and clear, but also gracious and persuasive. This session will look at how the Apostle Paul did this in Athens.

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### I. **PART I: *Approaching Paul in Athens – as a key passage about apologetics***

#### A. Introduction

1. The most popular Bible passage in popular apologetics

#### B. Popular *misunderstandings* of Acts 17

1. Paul on “Mars Hill”?
2. A formal legal defense?
3. A missionary primer?
4. A failure?

5. An isolated passage?

C. Pathways into Acts 17: Paul as an *authentic* and *relevant* apologist in Athens

1. fits Luke's overall purpose of Luke-Acts
2. fits the overall pattern in Acts
3. fits Luke's picture of Paul in the *agora* as a *herald of foreign gods*
4. fits Paul's own statements in his letters (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; Rom. 1:18-23; 1 Cor. 2:1-2)

**II. Part II: *Analyzing Paul in Athens - as an apologist in the marketplace***

A. Luke's narrative introduction (vv. 16-21)

1. The *agora* as the context and focus
2. Highlighting Athenian questions, objections, misunderstandings, and worldview alternatives

B. Paul's Areopagus Speech (vv. 22-31)

1. Points of contact:
  - a. Bridge building
  - b. The altar and the poets

2. The argument
  - a. Natural theology
  - b. Ultimate authority
  - c. Jesus and the Resurrection
3. Points of tension:
  - a. Challenging belief and behavior

C. Luke's narrative conclusion (vv. 32-34)

1. Dual reactions follow the normal pattern in Acts
2. Scorn, interest, and conversions in a challenging context in Athens

**III. PART III: *Applying lessons from Paul in Athens – in our apologetics ministries today***

A. Communicating into a secular and pluralistic marketplace-

1. Sacred', 'naked', or 'civil' public square?
2. Identifying points of contact and points of tension

B. Using Paul's overall argument / each argument

1. Natural theology

2. Ultimate authority
3. Jesus and the Resurrection

C. Generating interest where people are critical but curious

1. «*The open hand*»: exploring
  - a. wonder
  - b. authority
  - c. death
2. «*The closed fist*»: arguing for a Creator with ultimate authority
  - a. revealed in Jesus and the Resurrection

***Discussion questions:***

Q 1: Have you come across any of these misunderstandings of Acts 17?

Q 2: Why do you think Acts 17:16-34 is so popular among Christian / evangelical apologists?

Q 3: Were there any new discoveries or any surprises for you in this brief exposition of Acts 17?

Q 4: How would you personally apply Acts 17 as an apologetic model?

***Recommended Resources:***

<https://larsdahle.no/acts-17/>

Lars Dahle (2014): "Truth, Christian Mission and Apologetics: A Response and a Proposal"

<https://journals.mf.no/ntm/article/view/4285/3602>

Lars Dahle and Bjørn Hinderaker (2020): “Exploring Genesis 1-3 as a True Worldview Story: Reading alongside C. S. Lewis, Francis A. Schaeffer, and C. John Collins”

<https://theofilos.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Theofilos-vol-12-nr-1-2020-Supplement-forum-4.pdf>