

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XLIII. Heeding The Holy Spirit Under Duress

(Acts 17:13-17 et al.)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 17:13-17 reports that when Paul had been chased not only out of Thessalonica, but also out of Berea to Athens by pursuing Hebrews from Thessalonica, and he was concerned about the status of the Thessalonian converts and waited in Athens for news from Timothy about them, the Holy Spirit urged him to evangelize idolatrous Athens. This passages provides a lesson for disciplers on heeding the Holy Spirit under duress:

II. Heeding The Holy Spirit Under Duress, Acts 17:13-17.

- A. When Paul was led by concerned believers to leave Berea for Athens, he was under duress, Acts 17:13-15:
 1. Following the generally positive reception of the Gospel by the people in Berea, unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica who heard that Paul had then preached the Gospel of Christ in Berea came down to Berea and stirred up the people in that city against Paul, Acts 17:13.
 2. Believers in Berea realized the danger Paul faced, so they quickly sent him off on the way to the sea while Silas and Timothy remained behind in Berea, Acts 17:14 ESV.
 3. Those who were conducting Paul brought him as far south as Athens, Acts 17:15a.
 4. However, Paul was concerned about the spiritual welfare of the believers back in Thessalonica, likely due to the intense hatred of the unbelieving Hebrews who had pursued him from that city as far as Berea to stir up the city of Berea against him. Thus, he "sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-2, 5) to encourage the believers and then to report back on the condition of the church there. Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth (3:6), where the two Thessalonian epistles were written." (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians: The Work at Thessalonica," p. 1697)
 5. We thus read in Acts 17:15b ESV that Paul sent word through the Berean believers who left him in Athens for Timothy and Silas to come to him as soon as possible with news about the Thessalonian believers.
- B. However, while he waited for Timothy at Athens and was concerned about the welfare of the believers back in Thessalonica, the Holy Spirit strongly, persistently moved Paul to address the idolatry in Athens, Acts 17:16:
 1. While waiting in Athens, Paul's spirit was "being continually irritated, stirred up" (*paroxuneto*, passive imperfect of *paroxuno*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1963, p. 485; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 310-311) as he "was beholding, perceiving" (*theorountos*, present participle of *theoreo*, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 194) that the city was "grossly idolatrous" (*kateidolon*, feminine accusative of *kateidolos*, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 222), Acts 17:16.
 2. Since Paul's background was that of a theologically conservative Pharisee (cf. Philippians 3:5), he would naturally have been offended at the gross idolatry he saw in Athens, but the fact that he was **being** (passive voice) **continually** (imperfect tense) "irritated, stirred up" [*paroxuneto*] by it all indicates that the Holy Spirit was at work in Paul, prodding him to do something about the spiritual darkness that he saw there!
- C. So, regardless of his concern over the state of the Thessalonian believers, Paul began to address what the Holy Spirit was strongly urging him to address right where he was – the spiritual needs of Athens, Acts 17:17:
 1. Paul heeded the Holy Spirit's strong, persistent promptings by doing what he typically did in evangelizing a city – he first entered the Hebrew synagogue with the devout Greek proselytes there and began to reason with them from their Scriptures about the Christian faith, Acts 17:17a. (cf. Romans 1:16b)
 2. Paul then left the synagogue for the city marketplace and began witnessing about the Christian faith to whoever he happened to meet there, reaching lost souls of the Gentile world for Christ, Acts 17:17b.

Lesson: *Though Paul was very concerned about the spiritual state of the new converts he had evangelized back in Thessalonica due to the rabid hatred of the unbelieving Hebrews of that city that led them to pursue him in Berea and to turn the city of Berea against him, when the Holy Spirit persistently kept rousing his spirit over the idolatry of Athens where he waited for news about the Thessalonians, he heeded the Spirit and evangelized in Athens!*

Application: *If the Holy Spirit consistently stirs up our spirit to address a spiritual matter even if we have other spiritual concerns, we need to address that matter as a priority, leaving our other concerns for the Lord to handle.*