

Overcoming Cultural Secularism

I. **Introduction-** If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them and be finding Acts 17. Today, we are going to start looking at the issues that are impacting our world. This morning, we are looking at how we can overcome Cultural Secularism in America. It is easy to feel isolated in this place. We can openly demonstrate our faith, we can open our Bibles, we can bow our heads to pray out loud, we can celebrate our beliefs. Outside of these walls, however, is a world that is more and more becoming indifferent, and sometimes hostile, to the values and beliefs we hold as true.

In fact, studies show that the number of Americans claiming to be “nones” (those who claim no religious affiliation) is steadily increasing. The “nones” show to be increasing, especially within the younger generations. Studies indicate that now, 1 in 4 Americans are classified as “nones”. That means that as our world continues, we are going to see cultural secularism increase more and more. When we say “cultural secularism”, what we mean is a culture that is “indifferent toward or rejects religion as a basis for understanding and ethics” (britannica.com).

Cultural secularism believes that governance should be based on reason and evidence. This can lead to a decrease in religious influence and encourages neutrality regarding religious beliefs. But, here’s the good news- As Christians, we are not called to retreat from the culture. We are called to engage it! We are going to learn how to do so from Acts 17.

II. Sermon

As I have said, these sermons are going to be applicable, meaning there are going to be things for us to do so we can overcome cultural secularism. To do so, we are going to join Paul as he visits Athens. Look with me in **Acts 17:16-34**.

We are going to dissect the passage and then we’ll circle back to find the lessons for us to overcome cultural secularism.

1. Dissection:

1. Paul in Athens (v. 16-21)
 - i. Paul Provoked (v. 16)
 - ii. Paul Preaches (v. 17)
 - iii. Paul & Philosophers (v. 18-21)

1. Who are they? (v. 18) The Epicurean school of philosophy, named after its founder Epicurus (342–270 B.C.), held that pleasure, particularly a life free from pain, passion, superstition and anxiety, was the chief end and the highest good. Stoicism stressed living harmoniously with nature, using the rational abilities one possesses, and depending only on oneself for needs. God, to the Stoics, was some kind of world soul; their theology radiated pantheism. (Gangel, Acts)

2. What do they say? (v. 18)

Ἰησοῦν (Yay-seus) and ἀνάστασιν (a-nah-stah-ses)

3. What do they do? (v. 19-21)

2. Paul at the Areopagus (v. 22-34)

Areopagus means “Hill of Ares,” the Greek god of war. The Romans knew this god as Mars, which explains why we find “Mars Hill” (Gangel, *Acts*)

i. The Unknown God (v. 22)

1. An Old Monument ?

2. Epimenides the Cretan - According

to this story, Athens was being attacked by pestilence, and after consulting with the Oracle of Delphi, the Athenians sent a ship to Crete to ask for the help of Epimenides.

Epimenides agreed to help the Athenians. He came to Athens and brought some sheep to the Areopagus – an important location in Athens, also known as Ares Rock or Mars Hill. He released the sheep and allowed them to go where they pleased. Wherever a sheep lay down, Epimenides had the spot marked so that sacrifices could be made to the unknown local divinity there. Epimenides’ remedy worked, and Athens was delivered from its scourge. Thus, from that day onward, visitors to Athens would find altars to unknown gods around the city.

ii. Paul’s Points (v. 24-31)

1. God as Creator (v. 24-28)

2. God as Forgiver (v. 29-31)

iii. People’s Response (v. 32-34)

1. Some Mocked (v. 32)

2. Some Postpone (v. 32)

3. Some Believe (v. 33-34)

2. How Can We Overcome?

1. Understand the Context - Paul took the time to learn the culture of Athens.
2. Engage Respectfully - Paul begins with a compliment.
3. Find Common Ground - Paul uses their monument and their poet.
4. Present the Gospel Clearly - Paul shows how God created people, “overlooked” sin, and offers forgiveness.
5. Be Prepared for Reaction - The Gospel demands decision.

III. Conclusion-