



# *Paul in Athens: An Apologetic Model for Today*

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# *1. We need apologetics in our witness*

«We are called to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching – in every nation, in every area of society, and in the realm of ideas.»

Therefore, «we long to see greater commitment to the hard work of robust apologetics».

*(The Cape Town Commitment)*

“We long to see greater commitment to the hard work of robust apologetics. This must be **at two levels**:

1. We need to identify, equip and pray for those who can engage at the highest intellectual and public level in arguing for and defending biblical truth in the public arena.
2. We urge Church leaders and pastors to equip all believers with the courage and the tools to relate the truth with prophetic relevance to everyday public conversation, and so to engage every aspect of the culture we live in.”

***(The Cape Town Commitment)***

## *2. What is apologetics?*

«Apologetics is both **the closed fist** and **the open hand**» (Os Guinness)

«Apologetics specifically serves to show to **unbelievers** the truth of the Christian faith, to confirm that faith to **believers**, and to **reveal and explore** the connections between Christian doctrine and other truths” (William Lane Craig)

### *3. We need biblical foundations and models for our apologetics*

*The Book of Acts is full of models of communication and contextualization*

*Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) is the most commonly used model*

## 4. Why did Luke write Luke-Acts?

“<sup>3</sup>With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1)

**Luke shows:**

- a) the *historical* reliability
- b) the *intellectual* credibility
- c) the *personal* relevance and the *social* legitimacy

# ***5. Paul in Athens (Acts 17)***

**Introducing the visit & the context (verses 16-21)**

**a) What Paul saw / felt / did / said in Athens**

**b) Paul is facing Athenian questions, objections and worldview alternatives**

**The Areopagos Speech (verses 22-31) – see below!**

**The reactions & the results (verses 32-34)**

**Always a double reaction in the book of Acts.**

## ***6. Paul's Areopagos Speech is significant – but often misunderstood***

- 1) It is not a speech «on Mars Hill», but held in the *agora* «before The Areopagos Council»
- 2) It is not a 'sermon', but a public speech from 'a herold of foreign gods'.
- 3) It is not a formal defence, but addressing the 'licence to speak & to build an altar' issue.
- 4) It is not 'a missionary primer', but a 'follow-up speech'.
- 5) It is not a 'mistake', but 'an apologetic speech' where Paul addresses Athenian questions, objections and worldview alternatives .



## 7. Paul as 'the grand master'

The New Testament scholar N.T. Wright notes that Paul's approach in Athens may be compared to a chess game where he is 'the grand master' taking on all 'the players' of Athens at once.

# *8. Paul's argument in his speech*

- 1. Points of contact**
- 2. The 'natural theology' argument**
- 3. The 'ultimate authority' argument**
- 4. The 'Jesus and the Resurrection' argument**
- 5. Points of tension**

## ***9. Paul's approach in Athens***

- 1. He distinguished between the arenas, i.e. between the synagogue and the *agora* (marketplace).**
- 2. He chose an indirect approach because of the combined curiosity and critique**
- 3. He found common ground in the shared reality and their shared humanity.**
- 4. He combined proclamation and argument.**
- 5. He contextualized the Gospel without compromise.**
- 6. He built bridges and challenged.**

# **Resources:**

<http://larsdahle.no/apologetics/a-closed-fist-and-an-open-hand/>

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

[www.larsdahle.no](http://www.larsdahle.no) / @LarsDahle