

## **“REACHING TODAY’S AMERICA FOR CHRIST” SERIES**

### **#4: “From an Acts 2 to an Acts 17 Culture”**

**SCRIPTURE:** 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:1-4

***<sup>1</sup>I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup>For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.***

#### **INTRO:**

That time is now. So many people claiming to be Christians no longer hold to ***“sound doctrine.”*** And what is ***“sound doctrine”***? ***“Sound doctrine”*** is the teaching of Scripture – Scripture that tells us that God created the universe in six days; Scripture that tells us that Adam and Eve, the first two human beings, brought condemnation and mortalization upon all mankind; Scripture that tells us that after four thousand years God brought His Son into the world through a virgin named Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph; Scripture that tells us that only those who believe in Him and accept Him as Lord can be saved; Scripture that tells us the moral standards that God approves of; Scripture that tells us what we as Christians should believe and how we should live.

So many people today determine what they believe by today’s so-called “science” and make up their own moral standard, according to what “seems right” in our so-called “tolerant” culture. Like the people after the period of the judges, ***“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”*** (Judges 21:25).

As I said in a previous sermon in this series, “We used to be an Acts 2 culture; today we’re an Acts 17 culture.” We used to be a culture that needed to hear: ***“Repent and be baptized in the name of***

***Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Now we’re a culture that needs to hear: “I perceive that in every way you are very religious. . . The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man. . . He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. . . that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. . . The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”***

Do you hear the difference? The Acts 2 culture was ready to repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. They believed in God the Creator. The Acts 17 culture didn’t believe in the Creator God. Our culture is more like the Acts 17 crowd than the Acts 2 crowd.

As I said in an earlier message in this series, in the ‘40s, ‘50s, ‘60s and even into the ‘70s, America was an Acts 2 culture. Evangelists like Billy Graham could pack fifty and sixty thousand-seat stadiums and arenas. After hearing a simple call to repent and accept Christ, hundreds – thousands even – would respond to the invitation. That form of evangelism doesn’t work today. Evangelists can’t pack stadiums and people don’t respond to the message.

So, how did we get to this point? We’ve gone from an Acts 2 culture to an Acts 17 culture. Why? What happened?

First, let me be clear on something:

***EVEN THOUGH SUCH A CULTURE WAS PREDICTED, GOD DIDN’T CAUSE IT TO HAPPEN.***

God has foreknowledge, but He does not predestine. For example, Europe is not post-Christian because God willed it; Christianity is, for the most part, dead in Europe because Europeans turned away from God and Christ. The historic cathedral in Paris that caught fire and burned saw thousands of visitors but few

worshippers. Similarly, Christianity in America is declining, not because God prophesied it, but because Americans have become more wicked and have rejected God and His word.

Some think that as America gets worse, the return of Christ becomes more imminent, so their response is, “Let it happen! Bring it on!” That’s not good biblical eschatology. That’s more like *fatalism*, which leads to a “do nothing” attitude. Actually, as America’s culture becomes more and more secular, the church needs to shine all the more brightly.

One of the causes of America’s growing secular culture is...

**...*THE ABANDONMENT OF GOD’S MORAL STANDARDS.***

Abortion and sexual sin are two blatant symptoms of America’s abandonment of godliness.

When it comes to abortion, while proponents argue that it’s a women’s rights issue, in reality it’s often an issue of sexual sin and one of taking the life of an innocent child.

However, on June 24 – just a few days ago – the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision on a Mississippi case that struck down *Roe v. Wade* and ruled that abortion was a states issue to be determined by the elected representatives of each individual state. The states that want to allow abortions can do so; those that do not want to allow abortions can ban them; and each state is entitled to pass its own abortion laws.

America can, hopefully, now relinquish its claim to be the abortion capital of the world, with over 60 million children murdered since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973! America has been the most pro-abortion country in the western world!

God’s word is very clear on the matter. To kill a baby in the womb is murder. To take the life of an innocent person is murder. That’s what the sixth commandment is all about – not killing, as in capital punishment, but murdering. Medical science has proven that

life begins at conception. Determining whether a baby lives or dies is not a “choice” that a woman has a moral right to make. In choosing abortion, she is ending the life of someone else – a precious and unique soul created and loved by God. God views a preborn child as a precious person – a human being – in the womb, regardless of the situation in which that child was conceived.

America’s sexual sins have helped create our Acts 17 society. Both heterosexual and homosexual immorality are rampant and very open. The apostle Paul’s description of ungodliness and unrighteousness in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans is an appropriate description of America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

***<sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.***

***<sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.***

***<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup>and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.***

***<sup>28</sup>And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup>They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty,***

***boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup>Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.***

America has, to a great extent, decided that God's standards of behavior and morality are old-fashioned and too constraining, so we should determine our own standards and live the way that best suits us. So, we have complete openness concerning adultery, fornication and homosexuality. We have open marriages and same-sex marriages. As Billy Graham once said, "If God does not punish America for her sins, He should apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." We may not be Sodom and Gomorrah yet, but we're trending in that direction.

Closely connected to our abandonment of God's moral standards is...

### ***...THE BROKENNESS OF OUR HOMES.***

40 percent of America's children are born out of wedlock. One in three children live in a single-parent home. 55 percent of 15-17-year-olds do not live in intact families. In most broken homes, it's the father who's missing.

Broken homes are destructive to both boys and girls, but they don't suffer in the same ways. Girls who grow up deprived of their fathers are more likely to become depressed, to do self-harm, and to become promiscuous. And they still have their mothers, with whom they clearly identify. Boys don't have a comparable identification, so they suffer most from their father's absence, which girls typically do not. Fathers are models. When boys don't have this model, they suffer. And when they suffer, society suffers. Most school shooters come from fatherless homes.

70 percent of divorces are female-led. While a woman who's married to an abusive or dangerous man *should* file for divorce, so many divorces occur as an outgrowth of no-fault divorce laws. Too

many divorces are initiated by women who are simply searching for “a better match.”

Suzanne Venter, of Fox News, comments:

*“The root of fatherlessness rests in two things: our culture’s dismissal of men as valuable human beings who have something unique to offer – on the one hand, we tell them to ‘man up,’ and on the other we tell them manhood is the problem – and its dismissal of marriage as an institution that’s crucial to the health and well-being of children. This long-standing belief has been supplanted by the notion that marriage is about the emotional fulfillment of adults. It is not. Marriage is about the needs of children, pure and simple. That’s how it began, and that’s how it remains. Children’s needs are the same today as they were one hundred years ago. It is we, not they, who have changed.”*

In 2008, President Obama pointed out:

*“We know the statistics – that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of school and twenty times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our communities are weaker because of it.”*

You’ve heard of the situation in Chicago – the murders and other crimes, especially in African American communities. 86 percent of African American children don’t live with both their married parents. 85 percent of the children of Detroit and 64 percent of the children of Richmond, Virginia, were born to single mothers. That spells poverty, and poverty spells bad behavior. But the answer is not to simply alleviate poverty. The answer must include the building of biblically based marriages.

Yet another cause of America being an Acts 17 culture is...

**...THE GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OF ATHEISTIC EVOLUTIONISM.**

Creationism, or the Genesis account of creation, is hardly found anywhere in the curriculum of any government (public) school. The only colleges that teach creationism are Christian-based colleges. Yet, many church-connected colleges and universities don't teach it, and many of them don't teach that the Genesis account is true; they teach it as a myth or allegorical story.

Dr. Jennifer Hall Rivera has written:

*In today's culture, there is an attack on the truthfulness of Scripture and far too many people have bought into the idea that the Bible is not trustworthy in its teaching because of "science." But is it? Are science and the Bible in conflict? Some may mistakenly think so, because they have misunderstandings about what science is and what science is not (Glass House, p. 37).*

Much of the "science" of atheistic evolution is not real science. Scientists have allowed their prejudice toward Christianity and the Bible to distort their observations.

For example, the general populace has bought into the idea that the earth is billions of years old and that such attractions as the Grand Canyon took millions of years to form. Neither of these so-called scientific facts are based on true science. They are based on assumptions and belief that changes in the geological aspects of the earth have changed according to present natural processes over untold ages of time. Events like the eruption of Mount St. Helens have proven that such assumptions are wrong. Under such conditions, the Grand Canyon could have been formed in a few weeks or months.

Most scientists have an atheistic evolutionistic world view that locks them into views that leave no room for the biblical account of creation.

The influence of such "science" was so strong that Christians began to buy into it in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even such great preachers as Charles Spurgeon trusted the geologists of his day and bought into what is known as the "gap theory" that

combined the science of the day with the Genesis account. During this time the “day=age” theory developed, turning the six days of Genesis into six “ages.”

The bottom line is that Darwin was wrong in his theory of evolution, and “science” is wrong about the earth being billions or even millions of years old. The earth is no more than six thousand years old, as the Bible indicates.

But the vast majority of academia clings to a non-Christian worldview, churning out young people who reject biblical truth and work to produce an Acts 17 culture.

Finally, I must point out...

***...THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCH TO GROUND ITS YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN THE FAITH.***

Jude wrote in verse 3 of his very short letter: “*...contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*”

Peter wrote in chapter 3, verse 15 of his letter: “*...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...*”

As I pointed out in an earlier message, so many of the church’s young people – the millennials – are leaving the church and the faith when they go off to college. They’re not grounded in the faith. Their faith tends to be weak. Their knowledge of Scripture tends to be sparse. Their commitment to Christ is rather anemic. After six months on the college campus, what faith they had is gone. They become putty in the hands of atheistic professors. They join the party crowd.

In church programs for children, too often the church is little more than a baby-sitter or a child-care facility. Youth groups are too often entertainment clubs promoting “fun times.” In its educational programs, the church is teaching Acts 2 lessons to an Acts 17

generation of young people. We need to be making disciples – young people who will go out into the world, even on to college campuses, be strong in the faith and make a difference for Christ!

## **CONCLUSION:**

When Israel was promised the land of Canaan, the promise was conditional. It would be theirs until the end of the age... **IF THEY REMAINED FAITHFUL BY OBEYING GOD’S COMMANDS AND WORSHIPED HIM AND HIM ONLY.**

2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7:16-20 records that after the temple was completed, God told Solomon:

***“For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me as David your father walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with your father, saying, ‘You shall no lack a man to rule Israel.’***

***“But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you, and this house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and I will make it a proverb and a by word among all peoples.”***

America may not be “God’s chosen people,” but she has been blessed, yet I fear that unless we return to our roots in Christianity, God’s blessings will end. What’s more, while America may not always be great, God will be.