

Turning the World Upside Down
Acts 17:6

Acts 17:5-7 reads, “But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.”

As believers in the world, as the children of God and of light in this world, we have been given a mission and ministry toward this world to preach the gospel unto lost souls, to be a force of spiritual purification in society, and to shine the light of Christ into the darkness of this world. If we serve our Lord faithfully in fulfilling this mission and ministry toward the world, then He will use us to turn the world upside down spiritually. For his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul began with the intent to visit the believers in every city wherein he and Barnabas has preached the word of the Lord throughout their first missionary journey, and to see how those believers were doing spiritually. (See **Acts 15:36**) Even so, in **Acts 15:40-41** we read, “And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.” Furthermore, we read in **Acts 16:5-8**, “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.”

However, in **Acts 16:9-24** we read, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose

up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.” Following this, **Acts 16:25-40** presents the events concerning the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his household.

Then in **Acts 17:1-15** we read, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

The apostle Paul and those that ministered with him were faithful servants of the Lord in their ministry and mission as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and witnesses of the gospel. As such, they were used of the Lord to lead lost souls unto faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and to see lives changed thereby. Even so, in Acts 17:6 a group of unbelievers who opposed the truth of the gospel accused them of turning the world upside down through their witness and ministry. Yet from our Lord God’s perspective, the world is already upside down spiritually. It is in spiritual darkness and corruption, and therein it is bound for spiritual destruction. Thus when we are used of the Lord to turn the world upside down from the world’s perspective in ungodliness and unrighteousness, we are actually turning the world right side up from God’s perspective of righteousness and true holiness. So then, what is the spiritual condition of this world?

I. The Condition of This Evil World

In **Galatians 1:4** God’s Word describes this world’s system and society of humanity as “this present evil world.” Thus **Ephesians 2:2** describes us when we ourselves were members of this present evil world as lost sinners, saying, “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world [that is – according to the evil course of this present evil world],

according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” Even so, we learn that the members of this present evil world’s system and society are “the children of disobedience.” Furthermore, we learn that the evil course of this present evil world is arranged and established by “the prince of the power of the air,” the devil himself. He is the wicked prince of this world who holds mastery over the evil system and spiritual darkness of this present evil world. He is the wicked god of this world who is ever working to blind “the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (See **2 Corinthians 4:4**) He is the wicked spirit of ungodliness who is ever at work in the hearts and lives of those that are a part of this present evil world, ever motivating them to walk in disobedience against the Lord God. Even so, the closing portion of **1 John 5:19** reveals that “the whole world lieth in wickedness.”

Indeed, **1 John 2:16** reveals that everything in this present evil world’s course can be defined by a three-fold motivation – “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Thus the members of this present evil world, the children of disobedience, walk “in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (See **Ephesians 4:17-18**) Being under the wicked influence of the devil, they give themselves over unto the selfish lusts of their flesh, to fulfill the desires of their flesh and of their mind, and “to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (See **Ephesians 2:3 & 4:19**) Even so, they are “filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable [stubbornly unforgiving], unmerciful.” (See **Romans 1:29-31**) They love the spiritual darkness of their evil deeds, and hold it dear unto their hearts as a precious treasure. They are vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart is darkened. (See **Romans 1:21**) Even so, they profess themselves to be wise in their own spiritual darkness. Thus they “call evil good, and good evil.” They “put darkness for light, and light for darkness.” They “put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” (See **Isaiah 5:20**) Indeed, this present evil world is already upside down from the perspective of true godliness and righteousness. So then, what is the impact of a godly believer upon this present evil world?

II. The Contact of a Godly Believer

A godly believer will faithfully serve the Lord as “the salt of the earth.” As we have noted, this present evil world is filled with selfish and sinful corruption. A godly believer will be as a force of spiritual purification against that corruption. Day by day a godly believer will live a pure life within the world, and thereby will be used of the Lord to combat and counteract the corruption of this world. Yet the godly believer’s “salty” force of purity and purification will also produce a spiritual “sting” as the Lord uses it to combat this world’s corruption. Even so, the members of this present evil world will “think it strange” that the godly believer does not run with them “to the same excess” of selfish, sinful corruption. (See **1 Peter 4:3-4**) Even so, calling evil good, and good evil, the members of this present evil world will be moved to speak evil against the godly believer as if that believer were an evildoer. This they will do because the godly believer is being used of the Lord to turn their world upside down.

Indeed, this is just what happened unto the apostle Paul in Acts 16:16-24 when he cast the evil spirit out of the demon possessed damsel and thereby ruined the hope of her masters to continue using her for financial gain.

Furthermore, a godly believer will faithfully serve the Lord as “the light of the world.” As we have noted, this present evil world is under spiritual darkness and has placed its love and affection upon the spiritual darkness of its evil deeds. A godly believer will brightly shine the light of Christ into and against that darkness. Day by day a godly believer will walk as a child of light in contrast to the darkness of the world, and thereby will be used of the Lord to confront that darkness. Indeed, the godly believer’s character and conduct of light will be used of the Lord to reveal the true nature of this present evil world’s darkness and to reprove the world for the shameful darkness of their evil deeds. Even so, the members of this present evil world will find the revealing and reproving nature of the godly believer’s light to be offensive. Even so, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness, the members of this present evil world will be moved to fiery hatred and fierce opposition against the godly believer. This they will do because the godly believer is being used of the Lord to turn their world upside down. Indeed, this is just what happened unto the apostle Paul in Acts 17:5-9 when the unbelieving Jews were moved with envy against the apostle’s ministry and stirred up the people of the city against it until the whole city was in an uproar.

Finally, a godly believer will faithfully serve the Lord as a witness of the gospel. As we have noted, this present evil world is vain in its imaginations and blind in its understanding, professing itself to be wise, but actually being foolish in heart. A godly believer will engage in the preaching of Christ and His cross in the face of that foolishness and vanity. Thus the Lord will use the power of gospel preaching to save lost souls out of their spiritual corruption, darkness, blindness, and foolishness. However, the members of this present evil world will view the preaching of Christ and His cross as utter foolishness. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:18-21) Even so, putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, the members of this present evil world will despise the godly believer and his or her gospel preaching and will mock the godly believer and his or her preaching as foolish babbling. Indeed, this is just what happened unto the apostle Paul in Acts 17:16-34 when he preached the gospel at Athens. Indeed, this is just what happened unto the apostle in Acts 26:24 when Festus accused him of being beside himself and indicated that much learning had made him mad in the head.

III. The Conviction of the Holy Spirit

Yet when a godly believer comes into contact with this world, something more happens; and by Biblical definition a godly believer is a Spirit-filled believer. In **John 14:16-17** our Lord Jesus Christ declared, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he

dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” Herein we learn that God the Holy Spirit comes to abide within believers continually forever. Even so, in **Galatians 4:6** God’s Word reveals concerning all believers, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Then on the foundation of this truth, **Galatians 5:16** gives the instruction, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” In like manner, **Ephesians 5:18** gives the instruction, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” So then, a truly godly believer is one who walks daily under the filling and guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In **John 16:7-11** our Lord Jesus Christ revealed one of the results when a godly, Spirit-filled believer comes into contact with this world, saying, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you [to dwell in us in order that we might walk daily under His filling and guiding influence]. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” When a godly, Spirit-filled believer comes into contact with this world, God the Holy Spirit works through that believer to pierce the hearts of lost sinners with conviction. First, through the godly, Spirit-filled believer, the Holy Spirit will convict the lost of sin, piercing them with the truth that they have committed transgression against God’s holiness, and with the truth that only way of deliverance is not through good works, but through the Savior Jesus Christ. Furthermore, through the godly, Spirit-filled believer, the Holy Spirit will convict the lost of righteousness, piercing them with the truth that God’s standard of acceptance is His own perfect holiness and righteousness, and with the truth that faith in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the only way to meet that standard. Finally, through the godly, Spirit-filled believer, the Holy Spirit will convict the lost of judgment, piercing them with the truth that their sin against God’s holiness condemns them under God’s justice, and the truth that the justice of God requires a just judgment for sin in hell.

So then, how will the lost respond unto this conviction of the Holy Spirit as it pierces their hearts? Some will respond with submission, seeking the Lord’s solution to their sin, guilt, and condemnation. This we observe in the account of Acts 2. From Acts 2:1-4 we find that the apostles and those with them were filled with the Spirit. As such, they came into contact with the lost and preached the gospel unto them. Then Acts 2:37-41 gives the report, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

However, others will respond with anger, resisting the Holy Spirit’s conviction concerning their sin, guilt, and condemnation. This we observe in the account of Acts 6-7. From Acts 6:8-10 we learn that the man of God Stephen was filled with the Spirit. As such, he came into contact with the lost and preached the gospel unto them. Indeed, in Acts 7:51 Stephen

delivered the rebuke against them, saying, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” Then Acts 7:54-60 gives the report, “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

IV. The Conversion of a Lost Soul

Yet in the case of every spiritually lost soul who responds unto the conviction of the Holy Spirit aright through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal salvation, there is a genuine conversion of that soul from the heart outward. In the case of those in Acts 2 the report of God’s Word continues in **Acts 2:41-42**, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Even so, in **John 1:12-13** God’s Word speaks concerning this conversion of lost souls, saying, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born [that is – born again spiritually], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Again in **John 5:24** our Lord Jesus Christ spoke concerning this conversion of a lost soul, saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” Yet again in **John 8:12** our Lord Jesus spoke concerning this conversion, saying, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Indeed, in **Mark 5:1-15** and **Luke 8:26-36** we read about the conversion of a demon-possessed maniac, who lived among the tombs, ran around naked, cut on himself with stones, and could not be bound with ropes or chains. Yet through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, he was healed of his demon possession and was found sitting quietly, clothed, and in his right mind. In like manner, in **Acts 26:18** the apostle revealed that his gospel ministry toward lost souls was “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” In **Romans 6:17-18** the apostle gave report concerning the conversion of the believers at Rome, saying, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” In **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** the apostle gave report concerning the conversion of the believers at Corinth, saying, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit

the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

In **Ephesians 2:1-10** the apostle gave report concerning the conversion of the believers at Ephesus, saying, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Again in **Ephesians 5:8** he added, “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.”

In **1 Thessalonians 1:5-10** the apostle gave report concerning the conversion of the believers at Thessalonica, saying, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

Finally, in **Titus 3:3-7** the apostle Paul gave report concerning his own conversion, saying, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Indeed, this is the manner by which the world may be turned upside down spiritually – by the salvation and conversion of one lost soul at a time, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as eternal Savior.