

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul Vs Paganism

Acts 17:19-34

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: Paul finds himself in trouble yet again because of the gospel. This time he is taken to the formal court of Athens to be judged by the leading religious philosophers regarding this new teaching they think they hear. How will Paul respond? What will be his approach to those who are not schooled in the Scripture in any way?

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 17:19-34.
- B. Reminder of prior Sunday.
 - 1. Paul finds himself in Athens. Likely not the city he planned on visiting.
 - 2. He is deeply bothered by the gross idolatry of every conceivable type. Begins to talk to the people about Jesus Christ, both at the synagogue and at the agora.
 - 3. This leads to two groups of skilled debaters to approach and engage him. They belonged to the schools of Epicureanism and Stoicism (18).
 - a. Epicureans—Epicurus (341-270 B.C.).
 - (1) Pre-evolutionists.
 - (2) Soul dissolved at death.
 - (3) Gods were, at best, uninterested and uninvolved with this world.
 - (4) Pleasure, here and now, was the goal. Pleasure was not uninhibited but that which sought a peaceful, tranquil life.
 - b. Stoics—Zeno (340-265 B.C.).
 - (1) Panentheistic, God is in everything.
 - (2) Soul absorbed into god at death.
 - (3) Emphasized individual self-sufficiency.

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- (4) Believed they impacted the divine being with their lives by the simple fact that god was in them and they were a part of the god.
- 4. The over-arching mind set of Athenians was that there is truth, but no absolute truth. We all pursue what we think is best. This was post-modernism before it was cool.
- C. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers:
 - 1. Note that they were already predisposed to not be impressed with the message Paul gave. They listen through their belief system. Everyone does.
 - 2. Two basic conclusions are now in most of their minds:
 - a. He is just a religion scavenger (the reason it is translated "babbler" is that there seemed to be an unsystematic picking up of ideas rather than a careful, clean, systematic set of ideas) [this should encourage all of us when we feel the pressure that we are not as smart].
 - b. Or he is trying to bring two more gods of some type to be worshiped. Jesus = a deceased spirit and a goddess of resurrection.
- D. Here we pick back up. He is now standing on Mars Hill, to the left below is the Agora and to the right above them is the Acropolis.
- E. Athens was a city in love with ideas.
 - 1. They loved to hear and talk about new things (21). But it was not for the purpose of truth, but for mental interest and exercise. A new idea allowed for new discussions.
 - 2. But remember how I taught that there was no idea of absolute truth. It was relative and each could happily possess with their own version of truth.

II. Paul vs Paganism.

- A. The ignorance of paganism (22-23).
 - 1. It is not the lack of religion or spirituality.
 - a. Note that he spends very little time here. He is not trying to find a way where the gospel can have a place at the table.

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- b. Note in this first part of his presentation how Paul is not trying to be accepted. **Rather, he is quickly and efficiently brushing aside all other world views and beliefs.**
- 2. They are all ignorant of the true God.
- B. The God he proclaims is the creator of absolutely every thing.
 - 1. If you do not know where to begin when someone asks you about your “religion” or what you believe, start with this.
 - 2. Starts with God, which cuts to the very core of reality (24-26).
 - a. Note how unphilosophic his presentation is.
 - b. The God I am proclaiming to you is the One who created the world.
 - (1) What does this accomplish? It eliminates all other gods, belief systems, and philosophical view points.
 - (2) Instead of trying to talk about what a non-Christian believes, you just need to tell them about the God of the bible as He has revealed Himself.
 - c. He created everything in the world.
 - (1) God is not merely the creator on a big scale, but on a minute scale as well. Nothing that exists, nothing at all, is apart from the creative work of God.
 - (2) This is a small part of my problem with the many forms of theistic evolution that Christians try to postulate.
 - d. Paul then calls Him “Lord” (24b) – establishes His reign over His creation and their accountability (remember they were in Roman rule—Caesar was ‘lord.’)
 - (1) Their opinions don’t matter regarding Him, He is Lord over them and all things on earth. There is no other true Lord.
 - (2) The absolute Master and Ruler. To reject that is not just a decision with no consequences, it is high-handed rebellion.
 - e. He is self-sufficient (24c-25a)
 - (1) God does not need us. God does not need our worship. God does not need us to love Him. God is not needing therapy.

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God is not unhappy or unfulfilled seeking something from us to fill what is lacking.

(2) Can a temple made of materials God created and fashioned with the hands of created humans using mathematical, logical principles of measurements and standards, all created by God, build something that God would dwell in?

(3) Nothing created can give Him anything needed.

f. He supplies all that we need or have (25b)

(1) This is a pride crushing statement. And I am more and more convinced that we often fail to acknowledge it. We complain and grow angry when we have something taken from us. We think we are owed certain things because we have somehow served God sufficiently. But this only reveals the inadequacies of our heart.

(2) As Paul rebuked the Corinthians, *“For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* (1 Corinthians 4:7).

g. God ordains even our history, our birth, our ancestry and our nationality (26).

(1) “determined” comes from a term to separate, divide and carries the idea of ordaining or determining. This is the silliness of rejecting God’s utter sovereignty. Your birth, your ethnicity, your place in history—all determined by God.

(2) “appointed” simply means that God commanded and placed you where you are. Why does America exist? Because of God’s will. When will America cease, when God wills.

C. God has revealed Himself to mankind already (27-29).

1. Note that God is near and has made mankind to have a desire to search for Him.
2. But at the best, we can grope like those who are blind. Why? Paul does not say here but from the testimony of the bible we know it is due to sin.
3. As a result, we search for God but only as we desire God to be. We create a god that is in our image. And yet God is near to all people.

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- D. The judgment and the Judge (30-31).
 - 1. Now Paul pivots. Again, he is not trying to impress or earn a place at the table. He is proclaiming the true God. And so now he speaks of their guilt and responsibility.
 - 2. The time of ignorance was gone for them.
- E. The mixed reaction (32).
 - 1. The resurrection is the dividing point in this clash of beliefs. And it comes down to how these Athenians viewed life and death.
 - 2. Plato was a huge influence in their thinking. So, from Plato's viewpoint, the Christian view of the resurrection is the opposite of salvation. It is not a reward or something for which to be hoped. It is a catastrophe on a cosmic scale.
- F. The aftermath:
 - 1. A few believe.
 - 2. Some want to hear more.
 - 3. But most are unimpressed.
 - 4. But regardless, we do not see Paul spend any more time there. He doesn't return. He seems very unimpressed with those wanting to hear more.
 - 5. He leaves. We can assume he sought to strengthen and instruct the few. But he knew he was there for only a short time for once his companions arrived he was going to go to Corinth.

III. Conclusion.

- A. This passage is a master-class in how to keep things simple when telling people about God and salvation.
 - 1. But it requires you to be willing to engage.
 - 2. It requires you to stop trying to be honored or liked or respected in this age.
 - 3. It requires you to be a man or woman whose hope is very different than those without Jesus Christ.
- B. And to you here who are not Christians, this is my call to you as well.
 - 1. Your time is done. You have no excuse. Judgment is promised.
 - 2. And the One who shall judge you is the One you reject.

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3. And because He is holy and righteous, He shall judge you in truth.

Benediction

May our merciful God and Father open our eyes to the glory and vastness of His love toward us through Jesus His Son. May we see ourselves seated with Him in heaven as recipients of His grace. And may God grant us through the Spirit, eyes to grasp the many good works He has called us to love and do. Amen