

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

How to Defend The Faith **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.** Here we pick back up with Paul now standing on the famous Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill.
 - A. “The art of the speaker.”
 - 1. This more commonly known as rhetoric and it was the method of persuasive speaking for law, politics, education and religious discourse.
 - 2. This is a common issue that Paul faced, especially in Corinth, which is where he will be right after he is finished in Athens. Note what he writes to Corinth as he looks back upon his visit to them, *“I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”* (1 Corinthians 2:3-4).
 - B. Before we examine and learn from Paul on how he addressed this respected group of philosophical and religious leaders, I want us to consider how we ought to approach the nature of defending the Christian faith.
 - C. My working definition: “The philosophy of methodology on how we communicate Christianity to an unbelieving world.
 - D. I plan on explaining the three main approaches to apologetics/defending the Christian faith. I will then highlight the one I think is best and show why it excels over the other two. And finally, I plan to briefly show how Paul approaches his time before the Areopagus to see what he does.
 - E. Our mandate to be like Paul:
 - 1. **We are to stand against anything that is contrary to biblical truth:**
“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful

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for the tearing down of strongholds, as we tear down speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

2. **We are to give an answer to those who wonder about our hope in the midst of suffering and affliction:** “. . . but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).
3. **We are expected to contend against attacks within the church against the gospel:** “Beloved . . . I felt the necessity to write to you exhorting that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:3-4).

II. The Approach.

- A. First, understand that you will encounter all sorts of world views:
 1. The Greek Mind - assumes the autonomy of the human mind and finds answers to all questions of reality within the human mind. Man is his own highest good.
 2. Naturalism - Life is absurd, the universe does not co-operate with humans. There is no higher form watching over the earth. Similar to Epicureanism.
 3. Eastern Ontology - All is divine - all is one - all contrasts are divine. In creation, a divine being dismembered himself and made it into the world. Very similar to Stoicism.
 4. Judaic Christian - The universe is the creation of a personal God. Every fact of the universe and all reality is explained in light of the Creator.
- B. In the 1800's there was a key point of tension in the world of apologetics that affects us to this day. The Warfield/Kuyper Tension:
 1. Two key theologians with two very different approaches to how to defend the Christian faith and advance the gospel.
 2. Kuyper, a Dutch theologian, argued that philosophy can only serve and help theology, but it cannot replace or be over it.
 3. Warfield, president of Princeton Seminary, said that philosophy is essentially the big sister to theology and stands sufficiently on its own.

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4. As a result there became a very pronounced fracture in the world of apologetics.
- C. Three Basic Approaches to Apologetics:
1. Rationalistic Approach
 2. Evidentialist Approach
 3. Presuppositionalist Approach
 4. My position is firmly in the presuppositionalist camp but this does not mean that every thing a presuppositionalist might argue is mine.
- D. There are various ideas behind each of these schools of thought. But the biggest issue is how we know.
1. The fancy word is epistemology. How do we know what we know?
 2. And in this idea and question is a deeper question, how do we know truth?
 3. And underlying all of this is the question of how can someone know and believe in God?

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III. Some of The Theology of Presuppositionalism.

A. The doctrine of the Bible.

1. The bible does not seek to prove itself. It simply declares itself to be true, pure, able to make one wise, and a true revelation of God.
2. And it begins with the declaration that God created all things and makes no effort to prove or defend it.

B. The doctrine of God.

1. God is revealed in the bible and secondarily in nature, but only in part.
2. God is unique and stands outside of creation.
3. Nothing existed before God for God has no beginning. He is not developing nor is He learning. There is the idea of “divine simplicity.”
4. As a result of this, God is both transcendent and immanent.

5. As creator God has no need for humanity but humanity requires all things from Him.
6. We know Him through two specific ways: Nature and the special revelation.
 - a. *“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And the expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.”* (Psalm 19:1-2)
 - b. This includes God speaking to people in the past, through prophets, in Jesus Christ and scripture itself.

C. The doctrine of man and sin.

1. Man is a creation of God and is made in God’s image and likeness.
2. Through wilful disobedience of the first man, Adam, all of creation came under the power of sin.
3. All aspects of man is tainted and affected by sin. There is nothing in a person that is free from sin and the whole of a person is under the power and dominion of sin.
4. *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

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D. The doctrine of Christ and Salvation.

1. Jesus is God incarnate. He came to reconcile man to God.
2. In Christ, because He is God, we find truth in fulness, wisdom in fulness, and knowledge in fulness. Only when we are in a right relation to Jesus Christ can we then truly “know.”
3. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection both the power and penalty of sin is resolved. Sin is forgiven, death is destroyed. This is the gospel.
4. We receive this through faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

E. Knowing God.

1. Because of sin we cannot know God truly or rightly.
2. *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”* (Romans 1:18).
3. Unbelievers have a knowledge of fundamental truths about right and wrong. Not because of their skills in pursuing wisdom, but because God put it on their hearts. The problem is that they can do nothing about resolving their failings on their own. *“For when Gentiles who do not have the Law naturally do the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they demonstrate the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them”* (Romans 2:14-15)

F. Paul at Mars Hill.

1. He points out their religiosity but also their self-professed ignorance (22-23).
2. He then simply declares God to them (23c).
3. He is creator of all, He has no need for us, but rules over us and we need Him to live (24-25).
4. He made all the people and defines the nations and calls upon mankind to seek Him, though the best we can do is grope like blind men (26-27).
5. Even their own poets say rightly that we are God’s offspring, but they cannot understand what to do with that, so they approach God wrongly (28-29).

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6. But now, in this place and time, God says the time is now to know and believe. So they must turn from their way of thinking to God as Paul declares (30).
7. For God shall judge all through a man of His choice, having marked Him out through raising Him from the dead (31).
8. Note in all of this that there is no defense, no syllogisms, not engaging in debate or piling on evidence. It is simple, straight-forward declaration.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. If you know the gospel, you know enough to declare it. You do not need to be the wisest or smartest. You simply need to be willing to tell it.
- B. We can win the argument and still fail:
 1. When we make the goal of defending the faith to win rather than to faithfully present the gospel, we fail.
 2. When we have someone who has objections to the faith, we are faced with a choice. Do we chase down rabbit trails and try and prove the faith through evidences or do we point people to Christ? Remember that there are times when people only have objections because they just want an excuse not to believe.
- C. Our success in evangelization and defending the faith is not determined by results, how many converts we supposedly win. It is always and only our faithfulness to proclaim the gospel message.

Benediction

Now, may the God of peace, Who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.