

WELCOME!
Friday Men's Breakfast

April 9, 2021

Main Series Takeaways

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Philippians 1:21

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Big Idea:

Paul modeled a life *surrendered* to Jesus Christ for us to follow.



The Life of the Apostle Paul

#12 – “2nd Missionary Journey – Athens”

Acts 17:16-34

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New Testament Preaching to Pagans

13 Total Verses of Gospel Preaching to Pagans

- Lystra – 3 verses in Acts 14:15–17 – addressed to very superstitious uneducated agrarian folk
- Athens – 10 verses in Acts 17:22–31 – addressed to some of the most learned and influential people of the time.

Why Should Christians Be Stirred Up About Idols?

- Idolatry gives worship and credit that belongs to God to false gods.
- Idolatry deceives people by lies to worship what cannot save them.

The Aeropagus

Areopagus literally means “Hill of Aries” or “Mars Hill”

- The areopagus referred to both a place and to a governing body equivalent to the city council who met at that place.

Requirements to Add a New God to the Pantheon

Scholar Bruce Winter describes the process that a herald of a new god would have to go through in order to gain approval for the acceptance of his god in the pantheon:

- buying a site
- constructing an altar for sacrifices
- providing a substantial benefaction for at least an annual dinner to honour the gods
- possibly providing support for cultic officials.

Contextualization

The act of adapting how the gospel is presented and demonstrated to make it understandable and relevant to the hearers, ideally in a way that does not compromise the integrity of its content.

Staying Biblical Without Quoting Bible Verses

F. F. Bruce observes, “Like the biblical revelation itself, his speech begins with God the creator of all, continues with God the sustainer of all, and concludes with God the judge of all.”

The Big Idea

The gospel of Jesus Christ has *points of contact* and *points of conflict* with every culture and belief system.

Syncretism

Syncretism: reconciliation of different beliefs
From syn – “together” + second element of uncertain origin that could mean “lying” or “mixture”

Paul's Responses to the Areopagus Requirements for New Gods

- There is no need to buy land, because it all belongs to him already. (Acts 17:24)
- No need to build a temple because this God “does not live in temples made by man” (Acts 17:24).
- No need for an annual patron feast, because this God is not “served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:25).

Staying Biblical Without Quoting Bible Verses

D. A. Carson notes that without using a single Bible verse, “Paul presents a God who is actively involved in this world as its Creator, providential Ruler, Judge and self-disclosing Savior.”

The Big Idea

The gospel of Jesus Christ has *points of contact* and *points of conflict* with every culture and belief system.

Discussion Questions

1. Where does idolatry rank in the list of things that tend to stir you up, trouble, or provoke you? What ranks higher than idolatry?
2. Can you see any ways you might apply Paul's model of engaging the biblically unaware Athenians as you witness to biblically unaware or unbelieving people you know?
3. Try to think of a particular non-believer you could engage with the gospel. Can you think of any points of contact between the unbeliever's beliefs and the gospel? ... How might you address points of conflict between their beliefs and the gospel?

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Content Elements for Paul's Preaching to Pagans

Dale South

The following nine points recap elements brought out in the Lystra and Areopagus speeches that Paul used to help establish a Theocentric worldview before proclaiming the core gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection.

1. There is a living God who created the world and everything in it (Acts 14:15; 17:24);
2. This God generously gives his creation what it needs to continue—breath, rains, crops, everything else (Acts 14:17; 17:25)
3. By his generous provision and revelation through nature, the living God gives witness about himself, not leaving people clueless as to his existence. Though unknown by many, he is knowable (Acts 14:15, 17; 17:23)
4. The living God is sovereign over all nations (Acts 14:16; 17:26);
5. In their failure to recognize and know the living God, humans have chosen to worship vain things that do not have life in themselves and cannot give life. Unlike the living God, physical idols did not create humans, but were created by humans (Acts 14:15; 17:23, 29)
6. All human beings have a common ancestor, and all share a similar nature (Acts 17:26);
7. In the past, God has shown mercy for people's ignorance of him, but that time has ended (Acts 14:16; 17:30a)
8. God calls all people everywhere to turn away from the lesser, vain objects of worship in order to turn to him in faith (Acts 14:15; 17:30b)
9. A day is coming when God will judge all who do not turn to him in repentance (implied in Acts 14:16; 17:31).

These nine elements relate to the doctrines of: (1) creation, (2) God, (3) human beings, (4) sin, (5) repentance, (6) common grace, and (7) judgment. At best, the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of Christ will be superficially understood without some basic knowledge of the aforementioned doctrines.

Points of Contact and Conflict Between the Gospel and Epicurean and Stoic Philosophies

Eckhard Schnabel highlights several Epicurean views that Paul engages in his speech:

- Epicureans believed in the animated nature, the immortality of the soul and the bliss of the divine;
- Epicurus believed that the knowledge of god is apparent, a function of human reason;
- Epicurean philosophers argued that the gods do not live in temples that humans had built;
- Epicureans rejected the offering of sacrifices to the gods, arguing that a god does not need human things.¹⁵²

Schnabel also notes Paul making several points of contact to engage the Stoics. He lists,

- Stoics believed that the gods were immortal and rule over the world.
- Stoics referred to the gods as a diverse plurality, but they were also able to speak of “god” in the singular.
- Stoic understanding of god was essentially pantheistic.
- Stoics believed in the providence of the divine.
- Divine judgment was not alien to the Stoics.

One can almost imagine the Epicureans nodding in approval as Paul urged “not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man” (Acts 17:29), that God is knowable (Acts 17:23), that he “does not live in temples made by man” (Acts 17:24), and that he is not “served by human hands as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:25). Paul is aware of what the Epicureans believe, and he affirms those tenets that align with a biblical worldview.

He was equally aware of what the Stoics believed. Witherington notes, “The Stoics were basically panentheists,¹⁵⁴ believing there was a divine rational ordering principle that was in all things and beings. God’s relationship to the world was seen as analogous to that between the soul and the body.”¹⁵⁵ The gods were immanently present for the Stoics.

Again, one can imagine the Stoics nodding in approval as Paul speaks of God existing since creation (Acts 17:24), of his sovereign rule over the world as he “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling places” (Acts 17:26), of his presence as “he is actually not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27), of the fact that “he gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25), and even that “he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31).