

62. Sharing the Gospel with People with no Background

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to share the Gospel with people who have no background of the Bible. In Athens, Paul talked in the marketplace to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. They had no background of the Bible and so their religions were formed from their philosophies and ideas. In our topic today, we are going to see that these philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus, a court on Mars' Hill, where people could talk about their various ideas and philosophies. We will see that Paul realized that he had to begin with the Creator.

Acts 17:22-24 says, "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.'" Paul began by telling the people of Athens that he realized they were very religious. In fact, the city of Athens was filled with idols because of the many different religions. Paul also showed that he had been observing what the people believed as he walked around the city and observed their various idols. He said that he had even found an altar that had this written on it, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD". The people of Athens had built this altar in case there was a god that did not have an idol in their city.

Instead of condemning the people for their idol worship, Paul had found a bridge to begin to talk to the people about the God that they did not know. This is a key example for our own lives when we meet people with no Biblical background. We need to find a bridge instead of build a barrier. Paul said that he was going to tell them about the One that they worshiped even though they did not know who that was. He began by telling them that God is the One who is the Creator of the world and of everything in the world. Here, we see that Paul actually began with the first chapters of Genesis even though the Greeks had no knowledge of the Old Testament. He also said that the Creator is the Lord of both the heaven and the earth. Since He is the Creator, He does not live in temples that have been made with hands. Paul immediately explained the difference between the Creator and something that is created such as an idol.

Then, Paul went on to explain the difference between the worship of the Creator and the worship of anything else. Acts 17:25-29 says, "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'" Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." Paul made it clear that the Creator is not like the idols that are the work of man's hands.

Instead, the Creator is the source of all life. He is the One who has given breath to every person. He is the Creator of all things. Paul also pointed out the fact that all people have come from one blood. This was a statement about the fact that all people and nations have come from Adam regardless of where each particular group of people lives on the earth. This was important in Greece, because the Greeks thought that they were superior to all other people (as do the people of many other nations). Because we all come from one person, it means that we are all equal and that no group of people is superior.

Paul said that God also determined when each nation would become powerful and when it would fall. He said that God is the One who has set the boundaries where each group of people lives. God did all of these things so that all people would recognize that they have a need for God. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.” It is the desire of the Creator that all people would seek to know Him. In fact, Paul said that God is not very far from any of us. This statement refuted the ideas of the Greek philosophers who said that we cannot know God.

Paul then reminded the people gathered that day of the things that two of their own poets had said. Epimendes said, “In Him we live and move and have our being.” This particular Greek poet recognized that the Creator is the source of all life and that we must depend on Him for all things. Aratus said, “For we are also His offspring.” Since their own poets recognized that we were created by God, Paul said that we should not think that we can make the Divine Nature from silver or gold or stone. Such idols are shaped by the hand of man and come from the mind and thinking of man. It is impossible for them to even be compared to the Divine Nature of the Creator of all things.

Paul went on to say in Acts 17:30-31, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” The word translated “ignorance” means *lack of knowledge of divine things or moral blindness*. Ephesians 4:18 says, “Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Here, we see that spiritual blindness is the result of the lack of spiritual life and comes from a lack of knowledge of divine things. That is why God did not judge Adam and all others immediately, but put off His judgment for a period of time. He put off that judgment until Christ could take that judgment in our place and for our sin.

Then, Paul said that God now commands every man to repent. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 explains the meaning of repentance when that verse says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Repentance is turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Paul said that the day is coming when God will judge the world in righteousness. He will judge the world by the One that He has ordained. He showed who He has ordained by raising Him from the dead. Those who have repented by turning to God from idols by placing their faith in the One who is righteous

are made right with God and do not need to fear that day of judgment.

In 1 Timothy 2:5-6, we read, “For *there* is one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” Then, John 5:26-27 says, ““For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.”” Jesus Christ is the only One who can be the Mediator between God and man, because He paid the penalty for our sin by shedding His blood for our sin. God has given Christ the authority to carry out judgment against all those who reject His payment for sin. God gave assurance of this fact to all people by raising Christ from the dead.

When Paul mentioned the resurrection of the dead, the people there that day made one of three responses. Acts 17:32-34 says, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this *matter*.’” So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” Some people mocked when they heard about the resurrection of the dead. Greek philosophy did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and so many of those who mocked were probably philosophers. They did not want to hear any more.

However, there were others who wanted to hear more. These were people to whom the idea of the resurrection was such a new idea that they had to hear more in order to come to a true understanding. Many people today also need to hear more about the death and resurrection of Christ before they can understand and believe. God is working in their hearts as the Holy Spirit convicts (John 16:8-11), the Father draws (John 5:44) and the Son seeks and saves (Luke 19:10). We want to continue over time to explain the Word of God to such individuals until they come to a true understanding of the Gospel. Paul knew that these individuals needed time to think and so he departed to let them think.

Finally, there was a third group. The Lord had been working in the hearts of this group. The word translated “joined” means *to join or to firmly fasten together*. We read that this group believed in the fact that Christ is the Righteous One who could take away their sin. This group included a man by the name of Dionysius who was a member of the Areopagus court. This would be a person who had heard many philosophies, but the Lord worked in his heart and he recognized that Paul had shared the message that would give life. There was also a woman named Damaris who believed. In addition, we see that there were also several others who believed.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that when they share the Gospel with people, especially people with no background of the Bible, that they will also experience these same three responses. Some will mock, others will want to hear more and some may be ready to believe. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share the Gospel with people who have no Bible background.