

How to Witness to a Pagan – Part 2

Acts 17:19-34

Introduction:

1. When Paul arrived in the famous city of Athens, he immediately began preaching the gospel of Christ everywhere he went. vs. 17-18
2. Out of sheer curiosity, the philosophers in Athens brought Paul to the famous Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill. This was the highest court in Athens. This is where the philosophers would hear new doctrine or philosophies. vs. 19, 21
3. The purpose was for them to examine Paul and his doctrine. Little did they know that they were the ones on trial. They were being examined by the Word of God. How they responded would reveal their hearts and determine where they would spend eternity.
4. Paul began his message by confirming their interest in religious matters. vs. 22
 - “Superstition” is not the same as we think of today. It simply meant that they were very religiously minded. They were polytheistic. They had gods everywhere.
 - This simply reiterates to us the fact that people can be very religious, and be involved in religious rituals and religious matters, yet be lost in their sins.
5. Paul affirmed their ignorance of the true God. vs. 23
 - They knew all about religious things, yet did not know Christ. They were ignorant of the salvation made possible through Christ’s work on the cross and His glorious resurrection.
 - How sad when people know all about their religion, yet lack the most foundational and important element of all - a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Religion is not a substitute for Jesus Christ.
6. Paul’s message content to the Athenians was different than the messages he had preached previously in the synagogues. Why is this?
7. The Athenians were idolatrous pagans without any basic understanding of the Scriptures. Because of this, Paul had to start with the basics. You don’t teach trigonometry to a first grader. You start with the basics.
 - What is a pagan? Webster’s defines a pagan as “a follower of a polytheistic religion (as in Ancient Rome).” It also gives a second definition as “one who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures and material goods.”
 - “Pagan” used to be a name of contempt, but today people are very proud of their paganism. Bumper stickers: “Born Again Pagan,” “Pagan, Poly, and Proud”
 - All of us probably know people that do not have any kind of biblical background. They have little or no understanding of the true God or of Jesus Christ.
8. Paul’s message was a brilliant masterpiece, explaining the true God and who He is, while at the same time, destroying the props on which their idolatrous paganism stood.

9. How do you witness to a person that has no biblical background or understanding of God or of Christ? How do you witness to a person in a polytheistic religion (such as the Hindu religion)?
10. Paul's message will provide the framework for us. We must seek to help them understand:

The Power of God – vs. 24a

The Authority of God – vs. 24b

The Nature of God – vs. 24, 25, 29

1. These pagan Athenians had no concept of the true nature of God. There were man-made idols and images dedicated to every conceivable aspect of life. They were everywhere.
 - Someone once said, "It's easier to meet a god on the main street of Athens than it is to meet a man."
2. Paul corrected their misconceptions of God by stating three important truths about the one-and-only true God's nature:
 - The true God is omnipresent. vs. 24c
 - God cannot be confined to a building, a room, or a certain part of the universe.
 - God is present in all His power at every point in space and every moment in time. Psalm 139:7-12
 - The true God is omnipotent.
 - God's power is unlimited. He can do anything that is not inconsistent with His nature, character, purpose, or His Word.
 - Pagans would bring food to their idols and thought they were nourishing their gods.
 - Paul taught that the true God did not need this or depend on this.
 - The true God is a Spirit. vs. 29; cf. John 4:24
 - The pagan's gods were reduced to mere man-made idols or statues made of gold, silver, or stone.
 - John 4:24 teaches that God is a Spirit. God has no physical or measurable form. Thus, God is invisible. God became visible in human form in the person of Jesus Christ so that He could die for our sins. But, God's essence is invisible.
3. The Athenians had incredible artistic talents and great knowledge, but the making of idols and gods was nothing new, and it is something that fools do.
Romans 1:21-23

The Essentialness of God – vs. 25, 28a

1. Paul said about God, “...*seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.*”
2. This is another rebuff to the ludicrous theory of evolution. Mankind did not evolve from an ape, but “*God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*” **Genesis 2:7**; cf. Isaiah 42:5
3. God not only created everything by His marvelous power, but He sustains His creation by the word of His power. Hebrews 1:3
4. Our next breath is in the hands of God. We are totally dependent upon His mercy to sustain our lives, therefore we had better glorify Him. Daniel 5:23
5. It is foolish and arrogantly prideful for people to presume that they can survive without God.

The Nearness of God – vs. 27

1. Paul said about God, “...*though he be not far from every one of us.*”
2. Paganism often thought their gods were far off, busily involved in their activities, and therefore not really concerned about man and his deeds. They were aloof and distant.
3. But we have a God that is near to His creation. It is not a hard and arduous task to get close to God. The Bible says that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. God desires closeness to mankind. James 4:8
4. God desires this so much that He became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. John 1:14

The Wisdom of God – vs. 26

1. Great wisdom is evidenced in the way God made man and populated the earth. Paganism had no God with such wisdom. Their gods were limited in wisdom and ability.
2. Notice, Paul teaches that God made all nations of one blood. The Athenians considered themselves to be a master race, and other people were barbarians to them. Paul left no room for such teaching.
3. All races have a common origin; all trace their descent from Adam and Eve. We are all created of one blood. We originate from one source, and it is not a male and female ape. All genetic codes are traced back to Adam.
4. When the people of the earth stand before God, race will not carry any import whatsoever. The question will be, “What have you done with Jesus Christ?”