

How to Witness to a Pagan 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

1. Paul began with the basics by declaring that God is the Creator of all things. Hebrews 11:3
 - Creation is a belief about the past based on the Word of God.
 - Evolutionists believe what they believe about the past by faith. The observable facts simply are not there. Evolution is not science. True science deals with real, present-tense observation. Evolution is not based on the scientific method and is therefore a faith system.
2. God is all-powerful, and creation is a testimony to that truth. Romans 1:20
3. Many pagans believed that the material universe was eternal and it brought their gods into being. But the Bible declares that God existed **before** creation and called the world into being by His Word. From beginning to end, the Bible declares that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth.

The Authority of God – vs. 24b

1. Since God created the heavens and the earth, it only stands to reason that He is Lord over it. He is in control of the physical universe.
2. Since God created the universe out of nothing, it is His, and will always serve His purpose. He does not have to conform to nature and cannot be threatened by it.
 - **Illustration:** Jesus rebuked the winds and waves and commanded them to cease. They said, "*What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him...*" **Matthew 8:27**
3. As God shaped creation without any interference from anyone, He will bring creation to its desired end. 2 Peter 3:10-13
4. Because God is the Creator of everything (including us), our responsibility is to submit to His authority. Psalm 33:6-11
5. This is precisely why man has always sought for other reasons to explain mankind's existence and to explain creation. This is why belief systems such as polytheism and evolution have sprung up out of the heart of man. It is man's rebellion against the authority of God and the Lordship of Christ. Romans 1:21-23, 25
6. Man's rebellion is futile. Creation is under God's authority (Hebrews 1:10-12), and one day every rebellious heart of man will also recognize God's authority. Philippians 2:10-11

In Conclusion:

1. Next week we will continue to examine Paul's message to the Athenians, but may we all examine our own hearts and ask ourselves, "Have I submitted my heart to the power and authority of God Almighty?"
2. Rebellion against God's authority began with Satan, and then mankind joined in on the rebellion against God. Rebellion and sin brought nothing but death and misery.
3. But praise God for His mercy and grace. God has made a way for each of us to be reconciled back to Him. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22
4. Christ is the answer. Christ died for our sins, but rose from the dead. If you will submit your heart to Him and accept Him, you can be reconciled to God today and live with Him forever.

Next week – Part 2 of "How to Witness to a Pagan"