

How to Witness to a Pagan – Part 3

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” was 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

The Essentialness of God – vs. 25, 28a

The Nearness of God – vs. 27

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?"

The Plan of God – vs. 27a

1. God's plan from the very beginning has been for mankind to seek Him. The Bible is a record of some men who sought God and others who did not.
 - Abel sought God. Cain did not.
 - Abraham sought God. Lot did not.
 - Noah sought God. The rest of the world did not.
 - David sought God. His son Absalom did not.
2. The Bible promises that if a person seeks God, He can be found (Deuteronomy 4:29). God is "findable."
 - In love, God has always reached out to mankind with His Word (whether verbally through prophets, or through His written Word). Isaiah 45:19
 - God's creation is a testimony to mankind of the true God and the need to seek Him. Romans 1:20
 - Not only this, God sent His Son to this earth to reveal the Father. John 1:18

3. These blessed truths enable lost mankind to seek and find God. God made the first move. But God warns man to seek Him now and do not wait. Isaiah 55:6
4. God is a rewarder of those that “*diligently seek him.*” Hebrews 11:6

The Patience of God – vs. 30

1. Paul is about to bring his message to a climax. So, he mentions the grace of God, for that is what God’s patience is.
 - **Illustration:** If you are late on a bill and the person you owe says, “I will give you a 30-day grace period,” he is exercising a form of patience.
2. Paul says that God had overlooked the foolish paganism and sin of the past.
 - This speaks to the fact that God did not **immediately** judge the paganism and sin of the past.
 - He overlooked the sin for the time being, but will - in time - deal with man about this evil.
3. So what is the advantage to man that God overlooks our foolishness? The advantage is that God gives us time to repent of our sin. If God struck us down the moment we disobeyed, we would not be able to repent and therefore be saved.
4. Unfortunately, mankind often confuses God’s patience and grace for indifference. Psalm 10:4-7, 11, 14

The Command of God – vs. 30

1. Paul is telling these Athenians in no uncertain terms that they are sinners in need of repentance.
2. Notice, “*all men*” need to repent. Why? Romans 3:23 states, “*For all have sinned...*”
3. The time to repent is “*now.*” God’s grace period that He is extending to mankind could end at any moment. The time to trust Christ and be saved from your sins is today! 2 Corinthians 6:2

The Judgment of God – vs. 31

1. Greek theology had no concept of coming judgment. This must have fallen like a bombshell on the ears of Paul’s listeners.
2. But Paul lays out three aspects to God’s judgment:
 - Nobody will escape the judgment of God.
 - Paul said, “*the world.*” Every person will stand before God and be accountable for his or her actions and decisions. Hebrews 9:27
 - God’s judgment will be based on His righteousness.
 - The measure of right and wrong will not be based on man’s opinion, thoughts, or scholarship.
 - Everyone will be judged by the same righteous standard – God’s Word.
 - Nobody will be able to claim it was unjust, unfair, or inequitable.
 - The person who will judge is Jesus Christ.

- The assurance of the fact that Christ will be the judge is found in His resurrection. Because Christ is risen, He will be the final judge. Ephesians 1:20-22; John 5:22-27

In Conclusion:

1. Today, every person here can sing one of two songs:
 - Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine.
 - Horrific Assurance, Jesus Will Judge.
2. Today, you either have the assurance of eternal life if you are in Christ, or you have the assurance of eternal judgment if you are not in Christ.
3. Have you ever accepted Christ as your Savior? Have you trusted Him alone to deliver you from the penalty of your sin and give you eternal life?