



Sunday, May 13, 2012

Paul in Athens

Speaker: Joe Boot

Scripture: Acts 17

Sermon Notes:

1. While Paul is in the pagan city of Athens, he is provoked by the idols.
2. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts a righteous provocation toward idolatry because it is an offense to God and destructive to humanity.
3. In the market place Paul is labeled a seed picker, just as in our society orthodox Christianity is the single target of scorn and derision.
4. The new strategy is to implicate Christianity for all of the world's ills. In a similar situation, St Augustine wrote the *City of God* as an apologetic response to the accusation that Christianity caused the fall of Rome.
5. The Bible is relevant to issues of the world; it's a public book giving guidance to every circumstance, from economics to health care.
6. Paul interacted with naturalist intellectuals, who lived by reason and pleasure, and spent all their time battling around contradictory ideas.
7. Confronted with intellectual pluralism, idolatry, and biblical illiteracy, Paul was neither naive nor obscurantist. He was equipped in worldly learning, and he was able to proclaim God's Word powerfully.
8. Christianity provides the very foundations for learning and progress, so we ought to be seeking high achievement in submission to Christ.
9. Speaking before the *areopagus* (marketplace) is equivalent to speaking to Parliament and the faculty of leading universities.
10. NT writers didn't distinguish between pluralism and idolatry; allegiance to Christ as King rules out relativism.
11. We do not find Paul using the classical proofs for God's existence. Paul says we already know God but suppress the truth in unrighteousness, knowing that we're accountable to Him.
12. Man is an ethical being living in a moral universe. The biggest challenge for evangelism is ethics, not information. Ethical hostility to God is in our nature, and it's the essence of unbelief.
13. The offense of the gospel should not be based on our rudeness; Paul is uncompromising but winsome in his speech.

14. Paul doesn't provide evidences; sinful man will throw out any evidence that contradicts his worldview; and without the Christian worldview the evidences don't make sense anyway.
15. To understand the meaning of the resurrection you need the biblical background: The good creation; the fall; death as enemy; causal relationship between sin and death; God in Christ the second Adam defeats death; the resurrection is then inevitable.
16. Paul paints a picture of who God is, from a shared entry point, defining the doctrines of creation and God's sovereignty over all of history. He lays a ground-work so that Christ's resurrection makes sense.
17. Paul finally calls the assembly to repentance for their idolatry and suppression of the truth.
18. Paul's theology in Romans 1-3 requires this approach to the sermon.
19. When we defend the faith we must do so in terms of the God we believe in. It's not a subjective claim to say that Christ is Saviour and Lord; it's an absolute statement about what God has revealed.
20. You can't reach a true diagnosis for man based on false assumptions about God and the world. Absolute truth is necessary.
21. All truth is relative to God. Truth is what God says it is.
22. Unbelieving man absolutizes the relative by making his mind, feelings, and will absolute; thus he takes the place of God.
23. In our daily lives and conversations we're to take every thought captive in submission to Christ, that through us God may call many people to Himself (Rom. 1:18-20; 1 Cor. 1:19-21; 2 Cor. 10:5).

Application Questions:

1. What is the essential problem with man which informs Paul's apologetic approach?
2. What are the foundational biblical doctrines which are prerequisite for the preaching of the cross and the resurrection of Christ?
3. Explain why pluralism, relativism and inclusivism are just another form of idolatry. Why isn't Paul impressed by Athens and its "learning"?
4. How can we be winsome and yet uncompromising when sharing the gospel with pluralists?
5. What's the theological consequence of making man the arbiter of truth (i.e., by embracing relativism)?
6. What are some entry points for introducing the biblical worldview and the gospel in our conversations this week?
7. How can we start thinking and equipping ourselves, so that, like Paul, we can be ready to declare Christ to unchurched people?