

The One True God in a World of Philosophy | Acts 17:16-34 | 3/20/16

- Introduction
 - When we think of Athens and Greece we cannot help but to think of Greek mythology and philosophers.
 - Greece is well known for its mythology like the various God (Zeus, Poseidon, Hermes etc.).
 - We also think of Athens as an epicenter for all of the famous philosophers from history.
 - Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.).
 - This was the circumstances in which Paul found Athens when he visited to proclaim the Gospel to those people.
 - Paul found that Greece to be a difficult place to proclaim the World of God because of the rampant idol worship and perspectives of modern day philosophy.
 - Paul had to proclaim the truth to people who had already had beliefs in popular “god’s” and ways of thinking that would have to be overcome.
 - **Think of the contrasting differences between Jesus Christ and Zeus.**
 - We will examine the philosophy that Paul had to overcome and also how he gave an apologetic defense for the existence of the one true God who created the heavens and the Earth.
- The idols and philosophers of Athens | Acts 17:16-21
 - **Read Acts 17:16-21**
 - As Paul was in Athens we see that his spirit was troubled or provoked when he saw that the city was full of idols.
 - If there was a deity that man had made up it could be found in Athens.
 - You want to worship Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Ares or Poseidon you could do it there in Athens.
 - The Bible even speaks to the temple of Zeus
 - Acts 14:11-13
 - This of course troubled Paul greatly because these people were lost and were putting their faith into things created by man instead of the creator.
 - Romans 1:22-23
 - “Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.
 - Romans 1:25
 - “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.”
 - Idols have always been a problem for man that turns him away from the truth of God.
 - Exodus 32:1-4
 - Paul encounters the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.
 - So not only did Paul have to deal with the idol worship to these false gods of Greek mythology, but he also had to do deal with the philosophers.
 - So what is philosophy?
 - By definition:
 - The study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence.
 - It is man’s search to find the meaning of reality in our world through knowledge and the particulars of the world.
 - It has been around for centuries and well before the time of Christ.
 - Today post modernism is very popular

- With this view there is no absolute truth. Your truth may be different from mine.
- Epicurean Philosophy
 - Epicurean philosophy came from the teachings of Epicurus (342-270 B.C.)
 - He taught that life's purpose was to simply live a pleasant life that was free from pain.
 - Since it was focused on happiness and comfort it was very self-centered.
 - Do what you need to do so that it benefits you.
 - Makes sense because our selfish nature says I just want to be happy.
 - Make sure to enjoy all the pleasantries of life and avoid anything that might cause you pain.
 - **There is NO outside force guiding you or one that you have to obey.**
 - He believed that human beings are material objects that were created by chance.
 - He also had a scientific perspective regarding the the existence of human beings.
 - We were crated by chance and there is NO creator.
 - **Everything that we see and hear is matter.**
 - Their view on "gods" was that if they exist that they have 0 interaction with man and have no effect on mankind or our world.
 - **What does this remind you of today?**
 - Carl Sagan (1981)
 - "The cosmos is all that there is, or ever was and all that there will ever be."
- Stoic Philosophy
 - The Stoic's were founded by Cypriot Zeno (340-265 B.C.)
 - His teachings emphasized living in harmony with nature and having peace of mind.
 - The most important thing in life was to follow one's reason and be self-sufficient, and to not be affected by inner feelings or outward circumstances.
 - In other words, "inward peace"
 - The Stoic philosophy is based on pantheism
 - Pantheists believe that God and the world are identical.
 - All ("pan") is God ("theism")
 - Everything we see hear and touch (including ourselves) is God and God is in all.
 - Like the Epicurean's there is NO creator God because he could not create himself.
 - This the worldview of Hindus, Buddhists and Scientology.
 - This is where one become "enlightened" as they realize this truth that they and God are really one.
 - Reincarnation, karma and Nirvana (merge with God)
 - The "force" from Star Wars would be considered to be pantheism 😊
- Paul warns us not to be held captive by the philosophy of the world.
 - Colossians 2:8-10

- “Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ.”
 - Paul was well aware of the dangers of the worldly philosophy of his day and he gave great caution so that we would not be deceived.
 - Paul makes it clear that everything is and must be based on Christ.
 - If you try to make a case for the existence of the world or to determine the purpose of our lives without Christ, then it is wrong.
 - **It is only in Christ that we have absolute TRUTH.**
 - By proclaiming the truth then the world may come to its senses.
 - 2 Timothy 2:24-26
 - True philosophy however will come to the same point with true religion.
 - In other words, philosophers who quest for absolute truth will ultimately find it within the Scriptures.
 - **What modern day difficulties do we have when sharing the Gospel message in a world full of atheists, agnostics, humanists and philosophers that deny Christ?**
 - **Are these philosophical views attractive? Do people deny God because of them?**
- Paul stirs intellectual interest among the philosophers
 - While at first they took Paul as one who was just an armature philosopher, they soon had great interest in his teachings of Jesus Christ.
 - They being philosophers and always seeking knowledge knew this was something that was new to them so they were very interested.
 - Now whether or not some actually came to Christ or just wanted the knowledge we cannot say, but likely there was a mixture.
 - Just as there are people today who study Christianity in a religious course who have no desire to become a believer in Christ.
- Paul makes his case for the existence of the one true God | Acts 17:22-34
 - **Read Acts 17:22-34**
 - Paul sees the altar to “an unknown god”
 - Paul having been observing these people of Athens noticed that they had built an altar to a God that they believe existed but he was unknown to them.
 - This was a step in the right direction of course because they acknowledge that there was a God unlike some of the beliefs of the other philosophers.
 - Paul also notices that they are very “religious”
 - This is a great example of the difference between religion and being a Christian.
 - You can be “religious” but not be a Christian.
 - **Religion is man’s attempt to reach or find God. But to be a Christian is not work on man’s part instead it is God reaching out to man.**
 - Paul’s defense for the existence of God begins with a creator.
 - Paul then proceeds to tell these men of Athens who are searching and seeking a name for this unknown God by telling them who He is.
 - Paul chose to begin his apologetic defense of God with God.
 - When we think of how to begin sharing good news of Jesus Christ with a skeptic we have a couple of places we can choose to begin.
 - We can begin with Scripture and then show how it points to God.
 - Or one can begin with making a case for the existence of a God who is the creator of everything.
 - Paul showed them that the one true God was also a creator.

- For the one true God to be a creator would have gone against both of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.
- That there is a God who created the world and everything in it was a different perspective.
- That God gave life to man and He IS involved in every aspect of our lives.
 - So not only is the one true God a creator of the world, but he breathed life in to mankind.
 - God is a LIVING God.
 - Acts 14:15
 - We are not simply a chance of atoms smashing together but we are made by an intelligent creator.
 - This creator is not a God who sits on His throne and doesn't care about us, but no God has determined our boundaries of where we live.
 - God is a personal God who knows every detail of our lives.
 - This would be contrary to the beliefs of any of the other gods of Greek mythology.
- God is visible and made known through His creation.
 - Paul says in verse 27 that God created the world and mankind so that we might reach out and find Him. He also tells us that God is not far from us.
 - Skeptics who do not believe in God say that they will not believe unless they have proof.
 - God has given proof of His existence however it is not in the way that man is expecting.
 - Man desires to see God in what they picture in their minds like the Greek gods. However, this is not how God chose to reveal Himself.
 - One of the greatest passages of Scripture from the Bible that tells us how we can know that God does exist is found here in Romans.
 - Romans 1:19
 - "Since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse."
 - If we take a close look at the world and all of the living things within it, they call out that they were made by a creator, by intelligent design.
 - One of the biggest cases for their being a creator is the evidence of an intelligent designer.
 - Our modern sciences prove this.
 - Science is not against God, science is man finding and understanding what God has created.
 - **When you look at even the simplest of organisms, plant life or mammals you find that life only exists because of very specific things to take place.**
 - The human body itself is a prime example.
 - Leonardo da Vinci's perspective on the human foot.
 - "the human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art"
 - Leonardo the master engineer recognized that the human foot functioned so perfectly that it was a masterpiece of engineering.

- **Does this sound like the results of random atoms crashing to you?**
 - Think about how that just by using your mind that you can move your toes and fingers.
 - That everything is put together in a very specific way so that it works properly. Take something away and the system falls apart.
 - God's attributes are clearly visible in His creation.
 - When we gaze at the wonders of our world, God's power is clearly seen within it.
 - It took the work of God an intelligent designer, a creator to create the world that we live in.
 - We are without excuse.
 - In fact, the evidence of God is so obvious that the Bible says we are without excuse.
 - This means that when someone denies that God is the one responsible then they are suppressing the truth.
 - Romans 1:18
 - "For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."
 - Man who is so against there being a God will point to anything, anything at all to point to our world being only because of chance than to acknowledge a God.
- **Do you agree with Paul that the existence of our divine creator can be clearly seen in the world?**
- **What difficulties do we encounter when sharing with the "god does not exist because of science" crowd?**
- Christians must not be ashamed of the Gospel and be prepared to tell others "why" we believe.
 - Regardless of what the world says about God, we must not be ashamed to share it with the lost.
 - Romans 1:16
 - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.
 - Christians must be ready to tell others why they believe what they believe.
 - 1 Peter 3:15
 - "But honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."