

PREACHING TO GREEKS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. **1 Cor. 1:17-24 (NKJV):** ¹⁷*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. ¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written: "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND BRING TO NOTHING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRUDENT."* ²⁰*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²²For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

B. Jews & Greeks

1. Paul suggests there is a basic difference between the mentality of a Jew and a Greek [Gk. *Hellen* from which we get "Hellenistic"), and therefore our preaching (evangelism) needs to be adapted differently for each mindset
2. Jews already believe in God, have a Biblical foundation/worldview; Greeks represent an agnostic/atheistic culture that is secular in nature
3. In **Acts 2**, Peter preached to a Jewish audience and 3,000 souls were saved
 - a) Peter didn't need to convince them that there was a God or that the Scriptures were the ultimate authority – he started right off in v.16 quoting from the prophet Joel
 - b) The Church has traditionally used the Acts 2 model to evangelize, and western nations like the U.S. used to respond because they had a Biblical, godly foundation

(prayer, Bible reading, regular church attendance until the 1960's)

- c) But this approach is no longer effective in countries like the U.S. where the culture has been transformed into one more like the Greeks
 - d) We can no longer assume people here in the U.S. that we are evangelizing know the Bible or have even heard that God is Creator!
4. In **Acts 17**, Paul preached to a Greek audience using a very different approach and with very different results
- a) The Greek culture had a religious form, but was atheistic and dominated by secular, humanistic philosophy and intellectualism
 - b) This is the culture we are now facing in western nations like the U.S., and we need to adapt our preaching accordingly
 - c) Let us examine the Acts 17 model of evangelism...

II. PAUL'S ACTS 17 MODEL OF EVANGELISM (ACTS 17:16-34):

¹⁶Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, **his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.** ¹⁷Therefore **he reasoned** in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Then certain **Epicurean and Stoic philosophers** encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?" ²⁰For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." ²¹For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. ²²Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, **I perceive that in all things you are very religious;** ²³for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, **I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.** Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, **Him I proclaim to you:** ²⁴**God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord**

of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

²⁵Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since **He gives to all life, breath, and all things.** ²⁶And **He has made from one blood every nation of men** to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰Truly, **these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,** ³¹because **He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in** righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by **raising Him from the dead."** ³²And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." ³³So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

A. Greek culture (sounds like the U.S. today!)

1. Given over to **idolatry** (v.16)
2. Dominated by two opposing **philosophies** (v.18)
 - a) Epicurean
 - (1) Atheistic, evolutionary philosophy (centuries before Darwin!)
 - (2) Hedonistic, indulging in every kind of lust and pleasure
 - b) Stoic
 - (1) Practiced strict self-righteousness
 - (2) Prided themselves on their superior virtue
3. Paul's preaching was foolish "babbling" to them (v.18)
4. Greeks were very **religious** [Gk. *deisidaimonesteros* (*deilos* = "dread, fearful, faithless" + *daimon* = "a demon or supernatural spirit") = "superstitious, religious"] (v.22)
 - a) Many gods (Greek mythology)

- b) *Newsweek* (April 2009) cover article “The Decline and Fall of Christian America,” made this statement, “The present, in this sense, is less about the death of God and more about the birth of many gods.”
- c) Obama [from *The Audacity of Hope*]: “Whatever we once were, we are no longer. We are no longer just a Christian nation. We are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, a nation of nonbelievers.”
- d) Idolatry, occult and demonic activity were rampant
- e) The true God was unknown to them (v.23)

B. Paul’s strategy

1. Paul **reasoned** [“disputed, argued, discussed”] with them
 - a) **1 Pet. 3:15 (AMP):** *But in your hearts set Christ apart as holy [and acknowledge Him] as Lord. Always be ready to give a logical defense [Gk. apologia] to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, but do it courteously and respectfully.*
 - b) We need to be able to give logical reasons and defense (apologetics) for faith in God and the Scriptures
2. Paul proclaimed God as **Creator** of heaven and earth (and He therefore has authority to be **Lord** of creation also), the **Source** of all life (vv.24-25) – Gen. 1
 - a) With the whole culture now dominated by atheistic, evolutionary teaching from kindergarten right through college, we can’t assume anymore that people know that God is Creator
 - b) We must challenge people to examine the facts and understand what has happened in our modern secularized culture [see Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Pet. 3:3-7]
3. Paul explained the **origin of man** – all descended from one man Adam (v.26) – Gen 2-3
 - a) Implied: All inherited Adam’s sin (Rom. 5)
 - b) We are all one race – the human race (not many races)
 - c) Their **ignorance** and idolatry were the result of Adam’s sin (vv.29-30)

4. Paul emphasized the need to *seek the Lord* or *grope for Him* in hope of finding Him, for He is not far from us
5. Paul boldly preached *repentance* from sin: God now commands all people everywhere to repent (v.30)
6. Paul clearly explained God's final judgment for sin (v.31)
7. Paul preached Christ and the resurrection from the dead as the only answer (v.31)
8. The resurrection gives *assurance* ["**proof**" – NAS/NIV] that Christ will one day judge the world
 - a) Christ gave "**many infallible proofs**" (Acts 1:3) that He was alive after His crucifixion
 - b) In addition to the original apostles, there were over **500 eyewitnesses** who saw Jesus alive after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6)
- C. Their response to Paul's preaching
 1. Some *sneered*, some wanted to hear more (v.32)
 2. A *few* [NIV] believed and became followers (v.34)
 3. NOTE: Paul did *not* start a church in Athens –he departed from Athens and travelled on to Corinth (Acts 18:1)

III. CONCLUSION

- A. We are all called to preach Christ and the Good News to all nations (Mark 16:15-20; Mat. 28:18-20)
- B. We must know the spiritual condition of those we are preaching to
- C. Western culture has become more like the Greeks of Paul's day – secularized, idolatrous, and atheistic
- D. We must be prepared to refute evolutionary philosophies and explain the foundations from Genesis (God the Creator, man's origin and fall, sin and its consequences, the origin of suffering and death, etc.); we cannot assume they understand these things
- E. Preach Christ's death and resurrection, the coming Day of Judgment, and His call for everyone to repent
- F. Encourage the listeners to seek God – if they sincerely search for Him with their whole heart God promises they will find Him (Jer. 29:13)