

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 14:4-28:31

15. Christ's Use Of Paul To Exemplify Discipleship To Pagan Secular Humanists (Acts 17:16-34)

I. Introduction

- A. In our postmodern era, it would be helpful to have an example on discipling pagan secular humanists.
- B. Acts 17:16-34 reveals how Christ used Paul to disciple such people, one that acts as a pattern for us today:

II. Christ's Use Of Paul To Exemplify Discipleship To Pagan Secular Humanists, Acts 17:16-34.

- A. Paul's spirit was "greatly distressed" (NIV) when he saw the city of Athens entrenched in idolatry, 17:16.
- B. Accordingly, he began to disciple Jews in the synagogue (Acts 17:17a), his usual practice when entering a city (Acts 17:1-2), one that he as a Jew could comfortably initiate, cf. Philippians 3:4-6.
- C. As Paul reasoned the Gospel with Jews and "God-fearing Greeks" (NIV) at the synagogue, his discussion branched out into discussing the Gospel with pagans these synagogue folk knew in the marketplace, and that attracted the attention of educated Greek philosophers, the Epicureans and Stoics, Acts 17:17b-18.
- D. Since Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection from the dead, an idea foreign to Epicurean and Stoic concepts, they brought him for a hearing before the Areopagus, the court whose assembly had the power to condone or censure religious and educational teachings, Acts 17:19-21; Zond. Pict. Enc. of the Bib., 1975, p. 298. Paul thus sought to gain approval for his teaching from these officials by starting with what they believed to be true that also matched Biblical truth before moving them to unknown truths, 17:22-31:
 - 1. Paul had found an altar on Mars Hill, the original location of the Areopagus, with the inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD". The Greeks had constructed this in case they missed including one of the many gods so as not to offend any god, Acts 17:22-23a. Paul acknowledged his hearers' religiosity, and explained that he had come to tell them about that Unknown God they had missed, Acts 17:23b!
 - 2. Paul did not assume any Hebrew Scripture knowledge on the part of his pagan listeners, but provided them a "pre-evangelism" overview of God, His creation, and His interactions with man, Acts 17:24-28:
 - a. Paul revealed that this Unknown God was the Creator Who did not live in temples made by human hands as his Greek listeners held, but that He was sovereign, giving all life their existence, 17:24-25.
 - b. He added that God did not need anything to sustain Him, a belief agreeable to Epicureans, Acts 17:25a; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 403. Paul was clearly building a bridge with his listeners!
 - c. Paul's claim in Acts 17:25b that God provided humanity life and material provisions appealed to the Stoics who held they were to align their lives with the supreme "Purpose" of the Cosmos, Ibid.
 - d. Paul then launched out into concepts that were new to his pagan hearers, adding God had made from one man all people, and appointed their national boundaries so they might seek Him (Acts 17:26-28, Ibid.), but he supported this claim by citing their known writer, Epimenides, a Cretan poet and the poet Aratus from his work, *Phainomena* to show all men have their origin from God, 17:28a,b; Ibid.
 - 3. Then, Paul gave the Gospel, stating that God had long tolerated pagan idols, but now called all men to repent before the judgment, a repentance concerning Jesus Whom God raised from the dead, 17:29-31.
- E. The doctrine of the resurrection, foreign to Greek thinking (Acts 17:18c), caused a great division in Paul's listeners, so the hearing was adjourned for a later one (Acts 17:32-33). However, a member of the Areopagus, Dionysius, believed in Christ along with the woman Damaris and others, Acts 17:34.

Lesson: Christ used Paul to evangelize pagan humanists as follows: (1) He started with heeding the Spirit's lead to see a great need in the lost. (2) He then began witnessing to people whose background he understood, folk who could "bridge" him to make contact with their pagan friends. (3) In speaking with these pagans, Paul started to address what they believed that fit Biblical truth, and moved them to Biblical truths that were new to them, (4) providing adequate pre-evangelism facts before giving the Gospel. (5) Though not all pagans who heard accepted that Gospel, some did come to the Lord!

Application: May we follow Paul's example to be useful to the Lord in discipling postmodern pagans!