



Part 4: Making the Unknown God Known

INTRODUCTION – Syncretism VS Subversion

Syncretism: An attempt to fuse two incompatible systems of thought.

Subversion: Using the narrative and symbols of one system of thought to serve the telling of another.

DINE IN – The Approach of the Apostle Paul

THE PRINCIPLE...

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

THE PRACTICE...

Acts 13:13-48; 14:15-17; 17:16-34

Worth Noting...

- Paul knows his audience. He observes, asks, and learns *in dialogue*.
- Paul goes to great lengths to find points of agreement, believing that the same God he worships is already at work in the lives of every person and culture.
- Paul does not use Scripture to build his case when speaking with people who don't hold to the Bible as a source of authority. (As opposed to when he is reasoning with Bible-believers – See Acts 17:2-3.)
- Paul enters his audience's mindset and worldview and finds evidence of God already at work.
- Paul skillfully avoids any controversial points of disagreement that may distract from his central message (e.g., naming Adam, God, or even Jesus) until he has the chance to get to the gospel.

TAKE OUT – Lessons From the Example of Paul

- 1) Knowing the gospel thoroughly, not just memorizing phrases, but really knowing it so we can restate it in multiple ways, is good for us and for those we attempt to communicate it with. We should regularly practice rephrasing lessons we learn from Scripture in new ways.
- 2) Studying culture's thought, art, and entertainment should be a regular past-time for Christians interested in evangelism.
- 3) We can all begin evangelism *now*, by asking questions and learning about the spiritual views of people we know and seeing where the conversation goes.
- 4) When presenting the gospel...
 - a) look for and affirm God at work in the lives of your hearers
 - b) emphasize common beliefs before distinctives,
 - c) avoid divisive details of our faith that can distract from the centrality of Jesus in the message,
 - d) move the conversation toward the person and purpose of Jesus, or it isn't the gospel.
- 5) Find your joy in presenting Christ and loving others well, regardless of the results. Paul was the most brilliant mind in church history and his results were mixed at best.

CONCLUSION – The Universal Language of Compassion

1 Corinthians 9:22

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HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS

Warming Up...

1. Last week we talked about having at least one seed-planting, pebble-in-the-shoe conversation with someone over this past week. How did that go?
2. When we try to adapt the gospel to any other thought system or religious worldview, we are in danger of syncretism. Can you think of examples of times when Christians have gone too far identifying with the prevailing culture?

Look to the Book...

3. Read **Acts 17:16-34**. A) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? B) Have you ever been in a place or situation that offended you spiritually and/or provoked you to religious anger like Paul in **verse 16**? Are there certain people or belief systems that draw this reaction out of you most? C) What is the radical lesson of **verse 23**? D) How do **verses 24-25** capture the irreligious implications of the gospel?

So What?...

4. Review the point #4 in the TAKE OUT section of your notes. Talk about examples for each sub-point.
5. Let's practice explaining the gospel through role play. Break into partners, one being the Christian and the other the non-Christian. Take turns trying to explain the gospel to a) a New Ager, b) someone who is hurting because of negative religious experiences in their past, c) a disinterested atheist, d) someone who doesn't know what they believe but who has lots of questions, e) your choice.

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Notes are available online at themeetinghouse.ca/teaching