

Confronting the Philosophers

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of confronting one's own sin and repenting before God, rather than just pointing out the sins of society.

Duration: 30:00

Scripture: Acts 17:16, Acts 17:22

Topics: "Philosophy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of repentance and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He highlights that God has provided a way for people to avert judgment and find forgiveness by believing in the man who was put to death and raised from the dead, Jesus. The speaker references Luke 24:47, where Jesus instructs his followers to proclaim the message of repentance and the remission of sin to all nations. He warns against aversion and ridicule towards God's will and urges listeners to take responsibility for their own sins and seek reconciliation with God through repentance and receiving forgiveness.

Transcript

Hear now the reading of God's written word as it is recorded by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the seventeenth chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, beginning to read at verse sixteen. While Paul was waiting for them, that is, for Silas and Timothy, while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and day by day with those who happened to be there, a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

What is this babblers trying to say? He seems to be advocating foreign gods. They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, May we know what this new teaching is? You're bringing some strange ideas.

Incidentally, all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and observed your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription.

Now what you worship is something unknown. I am going to proclaim that God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built, and he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he determined so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far in him.

We live and move and have our lives, as some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring. Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not be imaged made by man's design and skill, such ignorance. He commands all people everywhere to repent.

For he has set a day in which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered.

Others said, we want to hear you again on this subject. At that, Paul left the council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed.

Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. Our theme for this morning, Confronting the Philosophers. One of the most famous and popular preachers at City Temple by the name of Joseph Parker.

He was not at all unaware of his splendid gifts. And when a small congregation asked him, his reply is said to have read, not at all, you just do not ask. On another Sunday, he came into the pulpit and said, brothers and sisters, on my way to the pulpit, I was handed a sheet of paper.

On this sheet of paper was written a warning. Dr. Parker, I want you to know that I will be sitting out there in the congregation listening to every word you say and making a philosophical analysis. And he said, I was filled with anxiety and trepidation till I looked and saw that philosophical had been spelt with an F. Confronting the Philosophers.

The Apostle Paul goes to the city of Athens. He is waiting to link up with two members of his missionary team, Silas and Timothy. And while he is waiting for them, he decides to take a walk around the city and to look at its glistening marbles and to look at the awesome structures that had been erected for business, for learning, and for worship.

And he is astounded by what he sees. And he is agitated by the spectacle of idolatry. He waits, he looks, he is disturbed.

He is disturbed because they have dared to take the image of the incorruptible God and they have likened him to birds and reptiles and to the fish of the sea. Presuming to be wise, they have made themselves fool things made by man that man can manipulate rather than worshiping a God who made us and him. All the days of our years, Paul took seriously as would any devout Jew, the teaching given in the Ten Commandments in the 20th chapter of the book of Exodus for he opposed idolatry because he was dearly devoted to the true and living God.

But the next thing that we notice is that he enters into dialogue. He doesn't begin with a strident denunciation of idolatry. He doesn't go around with a hammer or hatchet in hand as an iconoclast filled with fury and frenzy to smash everything in sight.

No, he enters into dialogue with the philosophers of Athens. He begins by going to the synagogue. That's his point of contact because in the synagogue he's going to find Jews waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

Jews who will agree with him when he speaks against idolatry because they are against it too. In the synagogue, he will also find God-fearing Gentiles who have become sickened with the pagan mythologies of the past and are looking for a nobler, more spiritual concept and they too will side with him. So he begins to build on whatever he can find in the context.

But more than that, he proceeds from the synagogue into the square and he not only talks to Jews and Gentiles who look to the God of Israel, he addresses himself to the philosophers in the marketplace and the pagans of the land. And he converses in the square taking the message out to people where they are. He converses with people who are Stoic and Epicurean.

Now when we hear that word Epicurean, what comes to mind especially as we move on toward 12 o'clock? Gourmet food. An Epicurean gourmet shop where you can get every kind of exotic food. Well, in the beginning it was not so.

Epicurus lived around 300 B.C. and he taught people that the universe was governed by chance, that it really didn't have any purpose. He taught them that if there were any gods and he wasn't quite sure of that, they were disinterested spectators up there, out there somewhere who were not providentially involved in the lives of men and women. He taught them that the important thing was to achieve inner tranquility and serenity.

Vanish every thought that would disturb your equanimity. It will make you happy. And of course, as often happens, the teachings of the masters are distorted by their overzealous disciples and Epicureanism became a synonym for the gratification of all human desires and passions.

Then you had the Stoics. They didn't believe that the universe was a matter of chance. They believed that the universe was run by an ironclad determinism.

They were fatalists. They didn't believe that the pursuit of pleasure was the great aim in life. They believed that the great aim in life was to be totally oblivious to pain and totally indifferent toward pleasure.

They believed that eventually the goal was to be absorbed into a great world soul where you would lose your identity. Now, here you have the Epicureans, the world of chance. Here you have the Stoic fatalism, ironclad determinism.

And here you have Paul speaking to both of them and his message is summarized as Jesus and the resurrection. They're baffled by what he has to say. But they're intrigued by what he says.

They suppose that Jesus and the resurrection are two separate gods or that they may even be husband and wife. Jesus and the resurrection. Anastasia in Greek.

And so they conceived this in their mind and they wanted to know more about the message. So they bring them up to the Areopagus where you have a council of noblemen and philosophers listening because they are taken up with the latest fad. And when Paul meets with them, when he confronts the philosophers he says that he's going to tell them about the unknown god.

Now they had alters to all kinds of gods and goddesses. To the god of war, to the god of love, to the god of wisdom and so forth. And in order to cover all the bases so that a god who was left out would not become angry and visit them with punishment they take care of those whom we might have omitted.

Now Paul says that's my point of contact. This god whom you do not know I'm going to give him a face to make the indefinite definite. And he unmasked, he unveiled the unknown god with a forthright declaration of his character and attributes.

First of all he says I want you to know that this god is the creator of heaven. He does not depend on us as though our hand had to prop. He made us with his omnipotent hand and he made us in the beginning in his likeness.

He is the creator god. That's where Paul begins. And he is the sustaining god.

He is no disinterested spectator away up there in the sky beyond the clouds. He is a god who is interested in what he has made. He is a god who has not abandoned the work of his hand.

He is a god who is providentially involved in the lives of men and women. He is the god of providence. And incidentally you proud men of Athens who imagine that you are a super race because of your pursuit of wisdom.

Let me remind you that this god made the human race, descended from one, and therefore there should be no grounds whatsoever for one race to discriminate against another for we are all his offspring. He is the creator. We are all his creatures and we have an equality in his sight.

The biblical doctrine of creation and providence should be the death knell of every last vessel. He is the creator. He is the sustainer.

And he is also the ruler. For he has appointed a day in which he will call the world to account. There will be a final audit and all of us will have to present our books to him before whose eyes all things are naked.

He has appointed a day in which there will be judgment and his judgment will not be vitiated. His judgment cannot be corrupted. He is not intimidated.

He is not bribed. He has appointed a day. He will call us to judgment and he will judge with straight-edge righteousness.

There is nothing wrong with the springs and the scale of God. He will weigh men and find them wanting for he himself is the absolute standard over and against which all will be weighed. It is appointed unto man the judgment.

Our final accountability to almighty God, creator of the heavens and the earth, our final audit in the eyes of him who is the judge. Now if Paul had stopped, that would have been bad news for the Stoics and bad news for the Epicureans. And what good is it for us to know that there is a God who is creator and sustainer and ruler when you and I are not only frail but fallible, when we are not faultless but sinful.

But the Bible does not stop there. Paul proceeded beyond a reference to the ruling gods. He also spoke of God as savior because he made reference to him who though he had been put to death was risen from the dead.

And now God offered men an opportunity to square their accounts with him by repentance. And that is what turns the message of Paul into good news because our God has not only fixed a day of judgment, he has also provided a way for you and me to avert judgment and find forgiveness. And that is through the man who was put to death, the man who was raised from the dead, the one who is a living savior, the one who will forgive.

So the message concludes on repentance toward all who repent. Isn't this what Jesus had taught when he came back from the dead? In the 24th chapter of the Gospels, Jesus states his will. He gives his followers a blueprint.

And he says, this is the game plan that I want you to follow. You are to begin in Jerusalem. You are to go to all nations and you are to announce this, that if men and women repent of their sin, God will grant a full pardon.

This is what God has named repentance. That is the way to avert. It is very easy for us to look at the world scene today and to deplore the awful mess into which society in general has fallen.

And it is very easy to pinpoint global problems and to look and say, behold how the industries have polluted the earth. Behold how crime rates soar in urban centers. Behold how shamefaced and audacious drug lords become to challenge the governance of civil wars.

Behold how awful is the evil of apartheid. Behold, behold, behold, and we can point to the sins of the world in general. And there are a lot of people, especially on university campuses, who can be high and mighty moral about world problems.

But when you face up to the question of personal sin, I'm not saying that we ought to minimize the global problems that afflict and affect us. But ultimately, sin has to do not merely with society in general, but with me in particular. And I must repent before God if I would experience my sins.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

And let him return to our God, for he will have mercy. Let him come back to the Lord, for he will abundantly pardon. You see, sin has its social dimensions, and it's easy to spot these and to denounce them.

But sin begins in the human mind, in the human will, in the human heart. And it is as individuals, personally. But we are to go to the Lord A long time ago, with a racially mixed gospel group, actually 50 years ago, I went with them and we sang in the nation's capital at Washington.

And one of the spirituals that we sang keeps coming back to haunt me. It's not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer. That is what repentance is all about.

It's not merely that the world has gone to the dog, morally speaking, but that I have sinned. I stand in need of praying the sinner's prayer. God be merciful to me, a sinner.

And so Paul speaks to these philosophers He speaks to these men who deal in global world issues and he pinpoints the basic problem that each of us as individuals needs to get right with God and each of us can find... We ought to stop blaming our heredity. Stop blaming our environment. Stop blaming the devil.

The devil made me do it? No. All the devil does is tempt us. We ourselves ought to take full credit for the achievement of sinning.

Satan may tempt, but it is men and women like us who say yes to him and no to the Lord. And therefore it is men and women like us who must squarely face the matter of our reconciliation with God through repentance and the receiving of the forgiveness of sin. Now what happened when Paul brought his message on Mars Hill? Exactly what happens at Cardina and Harvard every Sunday of the year? There were three reactions.

Some reacted with aversion. They said nonsense. When they heard him speak of the resurrection of the dead and the coming judgment, they sneered.

They treated the revelation of God's will with ridicule. Aversion. They got their back up.

They resisted. They rejected. God forbid that that should be the case here.

And I would issue a solemn warning. How shall you escape if you neglect so great an opportunity to repent and receive the remission of sin? Others didn't respond with downright rejection. They couldn't be accused of aversion, but of diversion.

They deflected the thrust of the message by saying, well, we'd like to hear more about it some other time in the future. We will not make a decision now. Eventually we'd like to hear you again, and maybe then we'll have opportunities to say yes or no in a more definite way.

There are people in various parts of the world who have seen death come with suddenness and devastating fury in the past few days. We dare not presume on a moral to which we will never partake. We dare not presume on a future all you and I can be sure of is today.

Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. We dare not lead to an indefinite future of a day that may never dawn.

What should be resolved as we do serious business with God here and now, some with aversion, some with diversion, refusing to face the issue. Others, for the Bible tells us that Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damar, and a number of others, they listened to the message, they believed what the apostles said, and they took steps of repentance that led to the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of life eternal. This is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world, sinners to save, even the cheapest of them.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Lord, we thank you that our universe is not in the grip of an equitable fate, nor left to blind chance, but is in the hands of a creator, provider, ruler, and savior like you. We thank you that you not only call us to account for our sins, but you offer us a way of forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, the remission of sins.

Grant, O God, that your Holy Spirit may strive with the hearts of the uncommitted, that this day each of us may be able to say, I take my place beneath the cross of Jesus, who died for my sin, is risen from the dead, and is my living savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26704.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mariano-di-gangi/confronting-the-philosophers/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net