

## SERMON OUTLINE

**SERMON TITLE:** Standing Firm in a Pagan World

**SERMON REFERENCE:** Acts 17:16-34

**LWF SERMON NUMBER:** #2456

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## 1) INTRODUCTION

- a) We are moving away from a Christian consensus in America.
  - i) Increasingly, many Americans believe that Jesus Christ is only one option among many options.
    - (1) This is called pluralism.
- b) We are expected today to accept all religions as equal.
  - i) We are even told that tolerance is wrong.
    - (1) We are not supposed to simply tolerate other religions, for that assumes that we don't agree with them.
    - (2) We are expected to go beyond tolerance to acceptance and approval.
- c) In Acts 17, the apostle Paul is in the city of Athens, the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world.
  - i) Paul is alone in the city, waiting on Timothy and Silas to join him.
  - ii) As he walks the streets of Athens, Paul sees the depth of depravity and the wickedness in the city.
    - (1) He saw false teachers and pagan temples.
  - iii) Paul looked up at a mountain called the Acropolis, and sitting on top of the Acropolis was perhaps the most architecturally-perfect building man ever created, the Parthenon.
    - (1) The Parthenon was dedicated to the sex goddess, Athene.
  - iv) Athens was the intellectual capital of mankind.
    - (1) It was full of art, literature and philosophy.
    - (2) It was the native home of Socrates and Plato.
    - (3) It became the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno.
  - v) As a result of this intellectualism and its cultural superiority, Athens was a city filled with cynicism, snobbery and debate.
- d) Paul is going to share Jesus Christ with the people of Athens, and he is going to meet strong resistance.
  - i) What Paul encountered so long ago is happening today in our society.
  - ii) The Scripture we're going to study today is not just about what has happened but what is happening.
    - (1) It's not just what God has said to others so long ago; it's what God is saying to our society today.
- e) There are three things that Paul met in ancient Athens, and these are the three things that we will meet today:
  - i) He met superstitious idolatry.
  - ii) He met sterile orthodoxy.
  - iii) He met sophisticated philosophy.
    - (1) God gave Paul an answer for each of these three things.
- f) In today's message, we will look at what we can expect to experience as we stand for our faith in a pagan society and as we go out and live for Christ.

## 2) YOU WILL EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES TO YOUR FAITH (ACTS 17:16, 22)

- a) If you are a Bible-believing Christian, you will experience challenges to your faith.
- b) What did Paul experience as a challenge?
  - i) Superstitious idolatry
    - (1) Acts 17:16, 22
    - (2) There were idols and pagan images everywhere.
      - (a) Ancient Athens had some 30,000 different gods that they worshipped.
    - (3) In today's society, every major city in America is filled with idolatry; the difference is that we give our idols different names.
    - (4) An idol is anything you love more, fear more, serve more or trust more than Almighty God.
      - (a) An idol is whatever is first place in your life.
      - (b) Whatever your heart trusts in, that is your idol.
    - (5) Idolatry is the greatest sin that anyone can commit because it transgresses the greatest commandment.
      - (a) Matthew 22:37
    - (6) We will face the gods of our cities as we go out each day.
    - (7) Here are some of the modern gods we face:
      - (a) The god of materialism
        - (i) The people in ancient Athens had the same god, but they called this god "Mammon."
        - (ii) The lives of those who worship this god are devoted to wealth, business, success and achievement.
          - 1. The major things in their lives are their possessions.
        - (iii) There are those who worship this god who are church-goers.
          - 1. They tip the hat to God, but God will not take second place.
        - (iv) The god of Mammon has had great influence in our lives.
          - 1. The drug dealers, the pornographers, the liquor industry, public officials who betray the nation's integrity for money, and the gambling industry serve the god of Mammon.
            - a. They are willing to destroy lives and the nation's morals for money.
    - (b) The god of alcohol
      - (i) The ancient people called this god "Bacchus."
        - 1. This was the god of liquor, alcohol, drunkenness, drugs and debauchery.
    - (c) The god of sex
      - (i) In ancient times, this god was named "Venus," "Aphrodite," and "Athene."
        - 1. This was the god of sexual lust and promiscuity.
      - (ii) America has been immersed in a swamp of adultery, fornication, homosexuality and pornography.

1. Some call pornography a victimless crime, but there's no such thing as a victimless crime.
- (d) The god of violence
  - (i) Just look at some of today's video games that kids are playing, and you will see that we worship the god of violence.
  - (ii) In ancient times, they called this god "Mars."
    1. This was the god of power, strength and revenge.
- (e) The god of wisdom and knowledge
  - (i) They named this god "Sophia."
  - (ii) Today, we worship at the shrine of our computers and universities.
- (8) Paul faced idolatry, and we face idolatry.
- (9) Matthew 6:33
  - (a) We have no right to worship anything other than Almighty God.
- (10) An idol is a magnified sinner.
  - (a) Man takes his worst vices and lusts, and he worships them.
  - (b) Romans 1:24-25
- (11) Even today, it would be far easier and accepted to blaspheme God than to say something derogatory about another human being because we worship the Creator less than we worship the creature.
- ii) Self-righteous orthodoxy
  - (1) Acts 17:17
    - (a) Here, Paul is facing not idolatry, but those who believe in the one true God; but they are self-satisfied.
      - (i) They do not know the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.
  - (2) These are the "respectable sinners."
    - (a) They look down upon others with their superstition, but these have never seen themselves in need of a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - (3) The apostle Paul had been this same kind of self-righteous bigot before he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and was transformed.
- iii) Sophisticated philosophy
  - (1) These are not the superstitious idolaters or the self-righteous orthodox, but these are they who see themselves as intellectual giants.
  - (2) Acts 17:18
  - (3) As the cultural and intellectual center of the world at that time, philosophers clustered to the city of Athens.
  - (4) The word "philosophy" literally means "a love of knowledge."
  - (5) Noted philosophers (including Schopenhauer, Huxley, Bertram Russell and H.G. Wells) discovered that philosophy can never satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart.
  - (6) What kind of philosophy did the apostle Paul find in Athens?
    - (a) The philosophy of pleasure.

- (i) Acts 17:18
  - (ii) Who were the Epicureans?
    - 1. Epicurus lived about 300 years before Christ.
      - a. His philosophy was simply that we really can't make sense out of life and that the search for pure truth by reason is impossible.
      - b. He believed that you can never find absolute truth, so just enjoy yourself because this is all you have.
      - c. He believed that the wisest thing is pleasure based on your own personal experience.
    - 2. Epicureans were lovers of pleasure.
  - (iii) We see in our cities today a philosophy of pleasure.
    - 1. Some say, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die."
  - (b) The philosophy of pride
    - (i) Acts 17:18
    - (ii) The Stoics were led by a philosopher named Zeno.
    - (iii) Stoicism believed in a form of fatalism; that we have no real choice in the things that are happening to us.
    - (iv) Stoics were also pantheists, believing that everything is God and God is everything; therefore, we're just swept up in it, and life has no real, vital meaning.
    - (v) Stoicism is a form of intellectual pride that smirked at those who thought they had the answer; it was self-sufficiency built on nihilism.
  - c) The philosophies of pleasure and pride are with us today.
- 3) YOU CAN EXPRESS CONFIDENCE IN YOUR FAITH (ACTS 17:19-21)
- a) In ancient Athens, they would make their discourses on Mars Hill.
    - i) Paul is given an opportunity to speak.
      - (1) Paul is standing in the shadow of the philosophers: Plato, Socrates, Zeno and Epicurus.
      - (2) The apostle Paul knew that this human wisdom and the beauty of Athens were magnificent foolishness without the Lord Jesus.
  - b) Acts 17:22-23
    - i) The people of Athens were covering all the bases; they even had an altar to "The Unknown God."
  - c) Paul begins to speak about the one true God.
    - i) God is the God of creative power.
      - (1) Acts 17:24-25
      - (2) God made everything, and He stands above and distinct from creation.
        - (a) In America today, however, we have gone from Father God to Mother Earth.
          - (i) In our public schools, we cannot celebrate Easter, but we can celebrate Earth Day.

- (3) Paul tells the Athenians that you cannot put God in a corner of the temple; He is the God of creation.
  - ii) God is the God of personal love.
    - (1) Acts 17:26-28
    - (2) God is a God of infinite love who loves us.
    - (3) Idolatry is the greatest sin because it is a repudiation of the very purpose of life.
      - (a) God created us to know Him and to love Him.
      - (b) In each heart is a desire to know and love Him.
  - iii) God is the God of supernatural salvation.
    - (1) Acts 17:31
    - (2) Paul is not ashamed to preach the resurrection of Christ.
      - (a) Some there on Mars Hill thought Paul was insane, but he still preached the resurrected Christ.
- 4) YOU CAN EXPECT CONVERTS TO YOUR FAITH (ACTS 17:32-34)
- a) When you share the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be people who believe.
  - b) The Gospel has the power to change lives.
  - c) Anytime we witness to others, there will be one of three responses:
    - i) There will be derision.
      - (1) Acts 17:32
      - (2) Some mocked Paul and laughed.
        - (a) Are you willing to be laughed at for your faith?
      - (3) The apostle Paul had the equivalent of a triple Ph.D., but he was willing to be thought a fool for Christ's sake.
        - (a) You may be laughed at by your unsaved spouse.
        - (b) You may be laughed at by your teacher or university professor.
        - (c) You may be laughed at in the business world for keeping a Bible on your desk.
        - (d) You may be laughed at for bowing your head in a restaurant before you eat.
    - ii) There will be delay.
      - (1) Acts 17:32
      - (2) Some people will try to put it off and will say that maybe tomorrow they will give their heart Jesus.
        - (a) Proverbs 27:1
      - (3) One of the devil's favorite ways to send a soul to Hell is through delay.
      - (4) If you intend to give your heart to Jesus, do it not.
    - iii) There will be decision.
      - (1) Acts 17:34
      - (2) There is power in the Gospel, and there is something in the human heart that recognizes the Gospel as the truth; and there will be those who will accept the Gospel as their truth.

5) CONCLUSION

- a) Don't laugh your way into Hell (derision).
- b) Don't turn over and go back to sleep (delay).
- c) Give your heart to Jesus today (decision).
- d) God loves you, and He wants to save you.
  - i) And He will save you if you will trust Him
- e) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.
- f) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
  - i) Romans 3:23
  - ii) Romans 10:9-10
  - iii) Romans 10:13
  - iv) Acts 16:31
  - v) John 3:16