

Lecture 18 – Paul Among the Pagans: All Things to All People

“On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.’” Acts 13:14-15

“When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’ ...The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them...” Acts 14:11 ff.

“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 the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there...” Acts 17:16-17

Key Terms

Apologetics, polytheism, respect

Objectives

- *Discuss Paul’s technique of adapting his message to the different types of unbelievers that he encountered on his missionary journeys.
- *Begin discussing the principles of communication that apply to our evangelistic encounters.

Introduction

Luke gives us three missionary or apologetic messages delivered by Paul in three very different contexts.

Acts 13: Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue

Acts 14: Uncultured pagans who are polytheists

Acts 17: More thoughtful pagans who are educated in the philosophy of their time

1. The message in the synagogue
 - a. The language and content
 - 1) Old Testament language
 - 2) Quotations from and allusions to Old Testament texts
 - b. What things Paul can take for granted

Can we take even these for granted today in a growing church?
2. The messages to pagans
 - a. Very different language and content
 - 1) No reference to the Old Testament
 - 2) No reference to the Messiah
 - 3) No reference to details of recent events in Palestine
 - b. What can Paul take for granted? And so what shapes his message?

These will be a constant in most human contexts where a missionary goes.
What is the fundamental barrier between people and God?

All Things to All People: Principles of Communication

Introduction:

When Paul preached to those with the Scriptures he emphasized Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy and the one who justifies those who have failed to keep the law. When he preached to those without the Scriptures he spoke from the early chapters of Genesis. Yet in different contexts we find the same principles governing Paul’s presentation. Paul develops principles of communication from his commitment to be all things to all

people for the sake of Christ, for the sake of the Gospel and for the love of those to whom he goes with the good news. These principles are to govern our communication in every cultural context where God sends us to make His truth known.

Principles:

1. Respect

- a. We expect Paul to show respect for the Jews and God-fearers in Pisidian Antioch for they share his cultural and religious heritage.
- b. Paul demonstrates respect despite his distress at the idolatry in Athens.
- c. Paul before Agrippa