

## Witnessing, Part 1

One of our purposes in studying various churches is to enable us to witness effectively to those who believe false doctrines. With that in mind, we take a brief interlude to look at one key issue in witnessing. What is the subject of our witnessing?

Paul, when he went to Athens, (Q1) found himself surrounded by idolatry. There were idols to every imaginable god, and just to cover all bases, even one to "The Unknown God". Paul was conducted to the Areopagus (Mars Hill) by philosophers (Q2) who enjoyed the discussion of new things. While it is not explicitly stated, we may legitimately expect that the major occupation of these philosophers was debate, with no real interest in truth. Two groups are specifically noted, the Epicureans and the Stoics. Matthew Henry comments on these two groups.

"(1.) the Epicureans, who thought God altogether such a one as themselves, an idle inactive being, that minded nothing, nor put any difference between good and evil. They would not own, either that God made the world or that he governs it; nor that man needs to make any conscience of what he says or does, having no punishment to fear nor rewards to hope for, all which loose atheistical notions Christianity is levelled against. The Epicureans indulged themselves in all the pleasures of sense, and placed their happiness in them, in what Christ has taught us in the first place to deny ourselves.

(2.) the Stoics, who thought themselves altogether as good as God, and indulged themselves as much in the pride of life as the Epicureans did in the lusts of the flesh and of the eye; they made their virtuous man to be no way inferior to God himself, nay to be superior. *Esse aliquid quo sapiens antecedit Deum*-- There is that in which a wise man excels God, so Seneca: to which Christianity is directly opposite, as it teaches us to deny ourselves and abase ourselves, and to come off from all confidence in ourselves, that Christ may be all in all."

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary)

As the encounter develops, we see (Q3) that some began to sneer, while others wished for Paul to return to debate with them another day. Paul had walked into their model, and attempted to argue within it. He did not initially challenge the existence of the false gods, but instead proclaimed the "Unknown God", tacitly placing the true God within a pantheon of gods. Instead, Paul left for more fertile ground. His attempt to correct the error of those who had no interest in truth was fruitless.

In much the same way, unless we are witnessing to someone who is actually interested and open to the Holy Spirit, we are unlikely to have any success. While we may sharpen our debating skills or knowledge of facts, little else is probable. Paul did not go away totally empty (Q4). A few of the Greeks were actually open to the facts, and became converts.

Paul realized that this approach was less likely to succeed than other approaches, and declared that he wished to know nothing other than Christ and the Cross (Q5). This approach is far more likely to succeed than argumentation and debate. Debate focuses on me against you. Adversarial relationships do not lead one to trust. On the other hand, when we focus on the answer to sin, Christ's great gift to us (Rom 6:23) shines with God's own light.

The final objective of Christians is to enter the kingdom of God (Q6). This is the Kingdom "of the Father". Put differently, our objective is to be with the Father. And there is one absolutely essential step on the road to the Father (Q7). Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life". We must know Jesus in order to get to know the Father. Which brings us to the key question (Q8). Will a false Jesus bring us to a knowledge of the true Father? This is the key.

As we studied the RCC, we found that they teach of a Jesus whose sacrifice on the cross was inadequate. It had to be supplemented by our "atoning works" and penances before we were clean enough to enter the kingdom. Then, when in need, rather than calling directly on Christ to intercede, we need to call on Mary. She is the calming motherly influence who takes the sword of justice out of the temperamental, vindictive hand of her Son. All the graces of heaven are said to pass through her hands.

When we studied the Biblical doctrine of Jesus, we found that He is not the Jesus of the Roman Catholic Church. And the Jesus of the RCC cannot save us, since a false Jesus cannot lead us to knowledge of the true Father. If we do not know the true Jesus (Q9), He will deny us before he Father in

the day of judgment. It is essential that we learn who Jesus is.

Jesus IS God (Q10). He is an inseparable part of the person of God. A study of the Trinity is beyond this session, but it must never be ignored. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Jesus' function is to be our intercessor (Q11). He stands in the presence of the Father and pleads for us. He is qualified to perform this service because in His great love for us He gave His life on the cross (Q12). Our penalty was paid by His blood. Paul realized that this is the only issue which matters in the end. So he chose to know nothing but Christ and the Cross. When we follow Paul's example, we are using the most powerful message that exists. We are lost in our depraved sinful state. God, out of a love which is beyond comprehension, sent His Son to pay our penalty. This sacrifice is the means by which we are reconciled to God and have a right to enter the kingdom.

We are to pray to Jesus himself (Q13) for assistance. We have no need to pray to Mary, or any reason to avoid praying directly to Jesus. (While we have not yet studied any teachings which indicate that we should not pray to Jesus, this will become important with Jehovah's Witnesses.) We have no need to have anyone else pray in our place, because we can come "boldly (Heb 4:16 KJV)" to Jesus (Q14).

We do not need Mary or anyone else to assist Jesus. Jesus alone is more than sufficient (Q15). If we confess our sin, He will forgive it. But we should not forget the next part of the text. He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we are clean, there is no longer any need for acts of atonement on our part. We are clean. Jesus is all we need. If we have any part in our salvation, then Jesus is inadequate. But our God is able, and Jesus is God.

Our task (Q16) is threefold: contrition, confession and compliance. We first recognize the depravity of our sin. Then, with a truly contrite heart, we come to Christ and confess our sin. Christ answers our faith with forgiveness. Our task is then to live according to the commandments of God. This is the "works" which demonstrates our faith. James is saying that in our contrition we renounce sin and banish it from our life. Since sin is law-breaking, we live in harmony with the law, which is a perfect transcript of the will of God.

Once we have done our duty to confess and comply, God does the rest (Q17). We rest secure in the guarantee that, as long as we wish to remain, nothing can separate us from the love of God. He will change us from corruptible to incorruptible and from mortal to immortality. Overcomers will sit with Jesus on His throne.

What other message is necessary? The love of God, evident in the sacrifice of His Son, when truly presented, will overpower any errors in the theology of the person who is open to the Holy Spirit. It is unlikely that coercive attempts via debate methods will be successful. We need to trust in Jesus, who will draw all men to himself (John 12:32).