



Exhortation before Declaration

Proverbs 18:20-21

20 A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth; From the produce of his lips he shall be filled.

21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

Sunday March 20, 2016

Understand and Reason

Part 3 in the series on: How To Win Souls And Make Disciples

Review:

Strategy #1: Invite and Pray

Strategy #2: Connect and Impact

NOTE: as we discuss these strategies lets keep in mind a few things:

1, all of us have been commissioned to win souls and make disciples, and all of us can do this. Start praying and asking the Lord to use you to win people to Him.

2, please keep in mind that although we are discussing each strategy independently, one each Sunday, these are not "mutually exclusive", rather these are strategies that lend themselves to each other and we do all of them : we connect and impact, we understand and reason , we invite and pray - all for the same individual we are engaging and sharing Jesus with.

Today:

Strategy #3: Understand and Reason.

Acts 17:16-34

Paul went on his second missionary journey approximately during A.D. 49 - A.D. 52. This is recorded for us in Acts 15:36 – Acts 18:22. Paul's second missionary journey lasted about 3 years, during which Paul and his team visited several places in Asia Minor and Europe, established many local churches. They preached in some of the major world cities of that time including Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. The text we read today, records Paul's visit to Athens.



Athens (capital of modern Greece) was considered the Intellectual Capital of the world at that time. Some interesting facts about Athens:

- Athens was named after the Greek goddess, Athena. Athens is one of the oldest named cities in the world, having been continuously inhabited for at least 5000 years. Athens was the home of many Greek philosophers as **Socrates** (469 BC–399 BC), **Plato** (423 BC–348 BC, approx) and **Demosthenes** (384 BC–322 BC). **Aristotle** (384 BC–322 BC) the Greek philosopher and scientist also spent some time studying at Plato's Academy in Athens from the age of 18 till he was 37 years of age. **Athens was a learning center for Science, Art, Philosophy having the greatest university of the ancient world.** Athens had two dominating philosophies at that time: EPICUREAN (pronounced 'epi-kurean') and STOICISM (pronounced 'stoy-icism'). The Epicureans followed the teachings of Epicurus and believed that everything happened by chance; that death was the end of all; they believed that the gods were remote from this world and did not care; and believed that pleasure was the chief end of man. Stoicism was founded by a man named Zeno, a contemporary of



Epicurus. The Stoics (pronounced 'stoy-iks') believed that everything was god and that God was a fiery spirit; that what gave men life was a little spark of that fiery spirit that dwelt in them, and when they died it returned to God; that everything that happened was the will of God; that every so often the world disintegrated in a conflagration and started all over again on the same cycle of events. Upon arriving in Athens, Paul sent a message to Silas and Timothy to hurry and come to Athens.

- The city of Athens was given over to idolatry (Acts 17:16). It is said that Athens had more idols or images than all the rest of Greece. Gaius Petronius Arbiter (AD 27 - AD 66) was a Roman courtier who satirically said it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Athens was called one great altar, one great offering to the gods, by the Greek historian Xenophon of Athens.
- It is interesting to see how Paul engaged such a city. He reasoned with the people, with the **Jews** in the synagogue, with the **religious Gentile worshippers** and with those in the **marketplace** (Acts 17:17). The '**Agora**' was the marketplace of ancient Athens. The agora was a large open space of assembly, where people bought and sold goods. It also served as a meeting place for people to discuss just about anything, and was the place where political/governmental and religious assemblies were held and decisions made. This is where democracy emerged. The agora was also a place where philosophers (e.g. Socrates) shared their ideas and questioned market-goers on matters such as the meaning of life, etc.
- The Epicureans and Stoics disagreed with the gospel of salvation that Paul taught at the agora. They called him ignorant and an advocate of foreign gods (Acts 17:18). They then scheduled a time for him to speak at **Areopagus or Mars Hill**.
- The Athenian Areopagus was **the city council**, made up of a select group of people, responsible for judicial, cultural, education and religious matters. The Areopagus sat to listen and evaluate what Paul had to say. Paul's sermon at the Areopagus or Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31) reveals how he reasoned with the people.

Acts 17:22-31

Without condemning Paul appreciates their inclination towards religious matters "You are very religious" (17:22). **Recognize where people are in their spiritual quest.**

He then addresses their ignorance which they have admitted to in the inscription of the altar "To an unknown god" (17:23) and used that as a backdrop to speak to them about the true God (Acts 17:23). **Use something they relate to and understand, as a starting point.**

"some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'" (Acts 17:28). Paul quoted from a Greek poet Aratus (310 BC – 240 BC). He used some of their own thinking to point them to the living God (Acts 17:28,29). **Let them know that you have made an effort to know and understand what they believe.**



He then moves into the Gospel talking about repentance, judgment, Jesus and His resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:30,31). ***Share the message of Jesus Christ.***

- Outcome: While some mocked at what they heard, some wanted to hear more at a later time, we have a record that some believed and stayed with Paul. This included one of the select men who was part of the Areopagus council “Dionysius the Areopagite”. In a highly religious and intellectual city of his time, Paul established a local community of believers.
- From Athens they travelled about 55 miles to **Corinth**. While we do not have a record of any further ministry or letters of Paul to the church in Athens, we do have an understanding of how Paul ministered from his letters to the Corinthians, from which we draw some lessons as well.

Additional insights on how Paul ministered:

Preach Christ and His work on the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:20-24)

Understand, reason, but remember that reasoning alone cannot do it all. We must depend on the work of the Spirit, signs, wonders and miracles (1 Corinthians 2:3-4)

Do not get into meaningless arguments and debates (2 Timothy 2:23-26)

Understanding Hindus and Muslims

Living here in Bangalore, we are likely to engage with: Hindus, Muslims, Atheists and Agnostics. We have some resources that can help equip us to speak to people with these backgrounds. (see our sermon series available online: REASONS done during October 2014. We also covered some of this in our CHURCH CAMP 2014). We will present briefly some thoughts to keep in mind when sharing the Gospel with Hindus and Muslims.

Points of emphasis when speaking with a Hindu

The existence of sin and evil - The Bible reveals the source of evil, sin and suffering. Karma and reincarnation, leaves man as a victim of relentless cause and effect.

Forgiveness contrasted with Karma and reincarnation - No concept of unearned, total and free forgiveness for sin and gift of salvation by the single, complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:2, Hebrews 10:14). Most would agree that it would be impossible to arrive at a net positive by karma given our natural inclination to sin.



Christ contrasted with many avatars - Christ unique, sinless, perfect, one and sufficient revelation of God. God is perfect, so He came once and did a perfect work for the salvation of the entire human race. There is no need for any thing more.

A loving God seeking personal relationship with man contrasted with "enlightenment", "liberation", etc. achieved by self effort.

Christ power to transform an individual life versus engaging in self-actualization, self-realization, self-discipline.

Points of emphasis when speaking to a Muslim

Get to know what they believe - Each Muslim can be different. So talk, find out what they believe, not all Muslims believe the same. Traditional Muslims not sure of salvation. Modern day Muslims are very different have a lot of new thought.

Establish genuine friendship - In the context of friendship you can share a lot.

3 things they would normally question:

- 1, Whether Christ is Lord (DIETY)
- 2, Whether He died on the cross (DEATH)
- 3, whether He rose from the dead (RESURRECTION)

The Nature of God - A Loving Creator God who is personal in contrast to an almighty but distant, unknowable God. Relationship is at the heart of the Christian understanding of God.

Sin - For a Muslim, sin can affect only people, not God. For a Christian, sin not only affects the sinner, but it also affects the loving relationship between God and man, and hence God is grieved at sin.

Forgiveness - A Muslim understands love in the context of God's mercy granting the possibility of salvation, as a sovereign act, and hence an escape from judgment and an entry into paradise. In contrast, in Christianity, we see God's justice and love expressed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and salvation assured to ALL who receive God's free gift of salvation. (Muslims on the other hand would state that God is able to forgive without the need for an atoning sacrifice and the idea that God became Man to be this sinless sacrifice is unacceptable. However, during *Hajji* each year, Muslims sacrifice animals to commemorate how Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son and how God provided a substitute. Perhaps, this could help in conveying the idea of substitutionary death). The fact that man was created in the image of God should make



it easier to present the idea of Incarnation, that hence, God could take on the "image of man".

Fatherhood of God - In Islam the relationship between God and man is more that of Potentate and subject than that between Father and son (or daughter). Hence, the fact that an individual can relate to God in a personal, meaningful way is a point that could be very important. There is great joy and wonder over the discovery that God can relate to us as Father.

Christian Life - life of faith, a walk of love, led by God's written Word and led by Holy Spirit in contrast to *Fatwa* (is the term for the legal opinion or learned interpretation that a qualified jurist or mufti can give on issues pertaining to the Islamic law.).

Closing:

With people you meet on a regular basis, engage with them on an ongoing basis.

Salvation Call : A short gospel message and prayer