

CONFRONTING THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

© Mark Beaird

Text: Acts 17:22-23

Whether one is watching Oprah or cable television where all sorts of people have access to the air waves to share their brand of spirituality one can easily see that many gods are embraced.

■ David Wells, in No Place for Truth, had this to say, “While religious pluralism may be a novel experience for us, it is putting us in touch with the world that surrounded the biblical authors. The pluralism and the paganism of Our Time were the common experience of the prophets and apostles. In Mesopotamia, there were thousands of gods and goddesses, many of which were known to the Israelites—indeed, sometimes known too well. ... Nothing, therefore, could be more remarkable than to hear the contention, even from those within the Church, that the existence of religious pluralism today makes belief in the uniqueness of Christianity quite impossible. Had this been the necessary consequence of encountering a multitude of other religions, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul would have given up biblical faith long before it became fashionable ... to do so.” -- Christianity Today, Vol. 38, no. 8.

We live in a society caught up in all manner of “spirituality” and diverse religious thought. As we note the *conditions* of our society we will no doubt see the parallel between our society and that of the Athenians

I. RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL THOUGHT CONSUME OUR SOCIETY (v. 22).

A. America is consumed by knowledge but lacks peace of mind.

People in America, as a rule, know more because of education, are exposed to more through the internet and media, and in some cases have more than ever before. The economy is better than it has been in years and people are even living longer. But fear of the future or about the future continues to stay in the forefront of their minds. America lacks peace of mind more than anything else.

A. The church is consumed with knowledge but lacks relevance.

■ It has been said that, “We have become the first completely post-Christian generation in the history of our culture. Our generation does not know God. Yet this is a generation that yearns and searches for spiritual reality. So far it is not finding it in the church.’

Those are the opening lines from the book, Reckless Hope, by Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen.

The first post-Christian generation in the history of our culture...not finding the satisfaction to our spiritual longing in the church. If that is true, it is tragic.

Are we prepared for the possibility of losing an entire generation of young people to a life and an eternity which does not experience the love of God, relationship with Jesus, forgiveness of sin, true healing of soul wounds, and salvation from eternal judgment? Are we willing to let that happen?

If not, we'd better pay attention to a radically shifting culture all around us and a generation of young people who do not think or process information like the generation before them did. Views of truth and reality itself are completely changing and it is no exaggeration to say that people are not the same at all in very significant ways as they were a generation ago.

No wonder the church has become irrelevant to so many people of our generation. No surprise that spiritual seekers are looking to self-help formulas and to new age and eastern mysticism to fill the spiritual void they feel and to find the answers to the questions of the meaning of life they are asking.” (Zafren 1)

These men that Paul was addressing were men who were literally consumed with the idea of religion. They were “very religious.” They evidently thought that the more they knew the more spiritual enlightenment that they would have. This was not the case. They were no more at peace than the rest of the world around them.

What a picture of the church world today! We have increased in knowledge and increased in anxiety. We have embraced many views and many answers in the hopes of finding a better way and we have lost the peace of a genuine experience.

The answer to a society that is embracing false religions instead of Christianity is for the church to become authentic in every way—not for us to embrace and accept everything that comes along.

II. NEW OBJECTS OF WORSHIP HAVE TAKEN THE PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST (v. 23a).

A. Instability has been the result of our society open-mindedness.

Instead of achieving understanding we as a society are more doubleminded than ever. We are worshipping what we do not even understand!

■ “Postmodernism produces a lack of coherence in (young people). An idea doesn’t have to be logical for them to subscribe to it. That’s the reason they can hold seemingly paradoxical viewpoints at the same time. If you’ve ever wondered why a (young person) you know is gung-ho to save endangered animals and even stress while simultaneously advocating abortion, postmodernity offers a reason why.” (Zafren 2)

In our society, no one has to “understand” his faith as long as feels strongly about it.

B. Absolute truth is gone, no god is supreme and all beliefs are accepted.

■ Josh McDowell writes, “As a Bible-believing adult, you undoubtedly accept some things to be absolutely and universally true; that is, true for all people, in all places, and at all times. You also accept that these absolutes are determined by God and communicated to us through His Word.”

However...“Truth to a postmodern world is *created* rather than *discovered*, each culture determines its own truth that is true only in and for that culture. Postmodernist contend that anyone who claims to hold an objective truth that unfavorably judges the values, beliefs,

or lifestyle of another person is intolerant and bigoted.” (McDowell 17)

Ironically, the one thing that the men at Mars Hill intellect could not remove was the fear of the unknown god.

III. BLIND SEARCHING HAS GIVEN WAY TO TOTAL ACCEPTANCE (v. 23b).

A. Many Americans have begun the search for God blindfolded.

Although, by their own admission, Americans lack understanding and do not know what is right, with outstretched arms they are ready to embrace whatever they find on their “spiritual journey.”

■ In an article entitled, “What is Postmodernism and Why Should We Care?,” Timothy Keller writes this:

During the last three decades, an era has emerged that many people are calling “post-modern.” The post-modern credo is that neither reason nor revelation give us objective truth. Post-moderns will say instead that all truth claims are socially constructed and arise when people groups and communities weave stories or narratives which give their community meaning and identity. Therefore, all truth claims are really fictional stories that “work” for such a group. So “truth” is always in quotation marks.

There are multiple, changeable truths. There are no essential principles, only contextual concepts. There is no inner essence, only surfaces and image. There are no boundaries, only combinations and connections. There is no grand or “meta-narrative,” only multiple story lines. We don’t have reality, but “virtual” reality. (Zafren 3)

B. That which the world blindly esteems, is in reality, the true God.

Ultimately humanity, either through philosophers or religion, has always been on a search for meaning. The Athenians searched for meaning through much the same way. The “unknown god” statue stood as a testimony to the fact that they had not found that for which they had searched. Paul’s message proclaimed that the one they ignorantly worshipped was the one who could give their life meaning.

America has obviously not found satisfaction in its search. Our message should point out the fact that we have that which they are searching for.

CONCLUSION

I was speaking to a medical doctor not too long ago and he made the statement that he did not discuss religion because “religious beliefs are intangible” and there is no way to prove one’s belief. I disagree completely. Everything about an authentic faith is “tangible,” the life changes, the peace, the joy, the deliverance from sin. An authentic faith can be measured, felt, passed on, and seen in everyday life.

The fact is that we have been given such a faith through Jesus Christ that it demands a voice in our life. I will go so far as to say that it (faith) cannot be, unless it is allowed to speak. The truth is that *conditions* in our society are crying out for such a faith.

References

McDowell, Josh. The Disconnected Generation. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000.

Zafren, Keith. Why A Church for a Postmodern Generation of Seekers?
16 March 1997 <<http://www.the-river.org/messages>>