

Words of Truth

Did Paul Soft Peddle The Gospel In Athens?

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One day Trevor was doing his schoolwork. He came to me with his speech book in hand. He had a section circled. He was upset and wanted me to read what was written in there. I have scanned what he had me read. Below you'll find that scanned copy from his textbook:

What is your protection against taking a dogmatic stance? What should you do? Be supportive of your listeners. Take into consideration their concerns and needs. Keep in mind the example of St. Paul as he stood on Mars Hill in Athens surrounded by listeners who were not in the least receptive to him. Paul was a Jew; his listeners were Greek; they were natives; he was a foreigner. With the burning zeal of his convictions, Paul believed that the message he brought was a true one. But did he choose to assume a dogmatic stance? No, he could sense the barrier. Instead of being overwhelmingly positive in his statements, Paul began by questioning his listeners. "On the way up here I passed a monument marked 'To an unknown god'; do you know the one I mean?" These are not his exact words, but they convey the gist of his opening. The reply of the natives, of course, was a yes-response; they knew what he was talking about. He had them saying "yes" to start off with. Next, instead of disparaging the gods worshipped by the Greeks, Paul said simply that he had come to discuss with them this unknown god. He was convincing and persuasive, and he succeeded in his mission. But nowhere in his challenging task did he offend his listeners by being overbearing. He was firm, yet receptive to rebuttal, to questioning, and to critical investigation by his listeners.

(Jean Bordeaux and Robert Allen; *"How To Talk More Effectively"*; American Technical Society; 1973; page 157).

Was Paul one who tried to sell the Gospel like the quote to the left strongly suggests? Consider this from the inspired pen of Paul: *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God... Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech"* (I Corinthians 2:1-5 and II Corinthians 3:12). The words above disprove the words of men to the left.

What Was Actually Said In Athens?

If you'll just read through the actual account of what occurred in Athens, you'll see that Jean Bordeaux and Robert Allen twisted the words of the Apostle Paul (cf. II Peter 3:15-17): *"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore **disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him**. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)*

*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, **Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.** God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. **And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:** Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:16-34).*

Like Paul above, we're not supposed to begin teaching by getting them to say "yes" or any other carnal speech tactic (II Corinthians 1:12). We're supposed to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (II Timothy 4:2). Notice how Paul really taught the word of God: *"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, **not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"** (II Corinthians 4:2).*

Conclusion

The Gospel is powerful (Romans 1:16 and Hebrews 4:12). You cannot speak the truth without offending those who do not want to hear it (Matthew 15:1-14; cf. Proverbs 17:7). Paul did not soft peddle the Gospel anywhere. He never tried to avoid seeming overbearing or dogmatic (Acts 13:6-13, Acts 13:44-51, Acts 19:8, Galatians 1:6-12, Galatians 2:1-5, Galatians 2:11-17, Galatians 4:16, Ephesians 6:19-20, and I Thessalonians 2:2-5). Let's be sure to follow Paul's example in teaching the truth plainly (I Corinthians 11:1).