

There is Another King: Jesus

Luke – Acts

Paul's Paradigmatic Speech to the Gentiles: Story and Ethics

Acts 17:15 – 34

Outline

The topic for this morning is why do sex, social justice, and evangelism go together? Well, one reason is because when we talk about Jesus, other people ask us questions about sex and justice. 'What is your stance on homosexuality?' In some parts of the country, that immediately comes up. As does, 'Why has the church been so racist, violent, against the poor, against women, and downright unjust?' Unless you know how to engage with that, you will always be afraid of talking about Jesus, or you'll try and fall on your face. And yet if you understand how sex, justice, and evangelism go together not just because of our culture, but intrinsically, you'll have a powerful witness. Because I am convinced that evangelism *restores meaning into* sex and justice. Actually what I'm going to do for about 30 minutes is to give you an evangelistic message I gave 3 times this past year. It's called 'How are sex and social justice tied together? A comparative approach'. I want you to hear this as if we were back on campus and you had brought your non-Christian friends to this event. Then, I'm going to debrief the message with you and tell you again why it's important, based on Acts 17.

Introduction: What You Might Think

Thanks for coming out to our time together. The topic for tonight is why do sex and social justice go together? And you might think that's kind of an odd topic, but just thinking about it a little more, you might say, 'Of course!' Those two things are the makings of a great movie or story. You save the world (justice) and find 'the one' (sex), all in the same story. And that is true. Sex in some sense signifies the pinnacle of individual intimate relationship. Social justice, in some sense, signifies the pinnacle of broad social relationships. They are at the core of our existence. Let's agree from the outset that these two subjects are very important to us.



Newsweek magazine just last November released this cover story: 'Sex vs. Social Justice' in 'The Politics of Jesus.' In today's U.S. politics, the 'religious right' has focused on sex issues at the expense of social justice issues, so there is a growing movement of Christians who want to correct that emphasis. And, let's agree that they are two of the most controversial subjects that we could possibly talk about. A group of people as diverse as this has a lot at stake in these questions. At every point, you might feel like you have something to gain or lose from the way we talk about these topics.

A Crisis in Judgment

Everyone has a stake in this. Let me give you an example, starting from a larger, higher level view of the issues and how complex it gets. About six and a half years ago, my wife Ming and I were expecting our first child, our son John. We went into Brigham and Women's Hospital for our 19 week ultrasound. While we were there in the hospital, the nurse also pointed out that John's ultrasound pictures revealed spots on his heart. That is correlated with Down's Syndrome. I've known a few kids with Down's Syndrome and their parents, so I had a pretty good idea of what that would involve, but I was in a bit of a shock. I don't think any parents expects or hopes for their child to be mentally handicapped. We also live in a lower income, higher crime area of Boston doing things like community organizing and such, so having a special needs child would have impacted us in some other ways. That's just to say that it would have been significant to us. Now the nurse recommended an additional test, which is called an amnio-centesis, on our next visit. It's where they can sample the fluids in the umbilical cord to determine with more accuracy whether the child would have Down's Syndrome. But when we went back, my wife Ming said, 'No thanks. We don't want to do the amnio.' They asked, 'Isn't it important for you to know?' Ming said, 'No. We would keep the baby either way.' The nurse and gynecologist were both surprised. The

gynecologist said, ‘May I ask why?’ Ming said, ‘Well, we’re Christians who try to take Jesus seriously and he would love this child, so we will too, even if he’s not what we expected.’ They were surprised because in their experience, most people would do the amnio, and if the test was positive for Down’s, most of them would get an abortion.

Why? This incident illustrates the classical tension: The tension is, ‘Are you important because you’re a person, no matter what? Or are you important because you have potential abilities, or actualized abilities? Do you have value and ‘rights’ because you can or have achieved something in the eyes of society? Or do you have value and ‘rights’ simply because you are human? And what’s the relationship between those two things?’ Does the amount of potential you have determine how much of a person you are? In the case of abortion, there is the question of (1) whether you’re a person or (2) whether you just have the potential to be a person. But what about mentally handicapped people, or just less intelligent people, who are indisputably persons but with less ‘potential’ at least as many would define it? What is justice in those cases? Is it ‘just’ for U.S. culture to mostly isolate these people into separate schools, communities, and most of all, institutions? The U.S. in particular treats such people quite badly, as opposed to some other countries. Now romantics and idealists would answer, ‘Of course they are persons!’ But in reality, that might just be a lot of talk. Peter Singer, professor of philosophy at Princeton, goes so far as to say that it is morally justifiable to euthanize, or kill, the elderly, the mentally retarded, etc. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one.

Ultimately I want to discuss how the biblical Christian story compares with the secular atheist story in evaluating these ethical situations. And don’t worry – we’ll get to issues of sexual expression and the justice related to that. But I want to back up and take a running start.

Engagement Between Two Stories: The Christian Story and the Greco–Roman Story

I’ll focus in on two older stories: the Greek, or Greco-Roman story, and the biblical story. I’m going to compare them to see what they tell us about life, sex, justice, and such.

Greco-Roman Story
The immortal, good soul wants to escape the bad physical body
Expected ‘disembodiment’ – the separation of soul from body
Death is inevitable and is the end; no one comes back from the dead (cf. Homer)
Caring for the poor is not important since the body is not important
Sexuality – where does it come from? Who knows?
Have sex with anyone since the body is not important (e.g. Greek Epicureans)

How does the story begin? How does it end? The Greco-Roman story says that the immortal soul, which is good, wants to escape the physical body, which is bad. So the Greco-Roman people expected and hoped for ‘disembodiment,’ the separation of the soul from the body. When would that happen? At death. Death is inevitable and is the end of the terrible union of soul and body; Homer said that no one comes back from the dead. That’s why in the movie Troy, the Brad Pitt character Achilles believes that the only way to gain immortality on earth is to become famous, to have your name remembered. The important thing to note here is that story leads to action. If our souls just want to leave our bodies, then why care for the poor? Other people’s bodies just aren’t that important. And if your body isn’t important, then why not have sex with whoever you wanted? The Epicureans believed that.

So the Greeks were the first civilization to have developed ideas about democracy. Ironically, they were also the first civilization to use mass slavery. According to Yale historian David Bryon Davis and Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson, certain Greek men were able to lounge around in the gymnasium and on rooftops philosophizing about democracy because they made slaves do all their work for them. That’s the ironic legacy of the West: freedom for some built on the slavery of others.

But into this swirling mess of Mediterranean injustice came another story. A variation of Judaism sprang up from Israel and confronted the Greco-Roman world with a very different story. It was Christianity.

The Christian story draws on the Book of Genesis to say that we were created good, both body and soul. It was good to be physical. It was good for the soul to be in the body. Now the problem is that human sin messed things up, and we have sin in our souls and disease and decay in our bodies. But the answer to that is not disembodiment but resurrection. They wanted to come back into renewed, immortal bodies, permanently. The idea was not to be weightless souls floating around in the clouds. It was to have both feet physically on the ground, and more solid than before. This is where we get the expressions, ‘She is a person of substance,’ or, ‘He’s heavy.’ The more good you are, the more solid you are. After all, if God created the world good, and human bodies good, then the problem is decay, death, and sin. God will deal with those things, but he’ll renew us. And Jesus’ bodily resurrection affirms the fact that soul and body will be reunited when the rest of Jesus’ people are bodily resurrected.

What were the ethical implications of the Christian story? Christians wanted to care for the poor because people’s bodies mattered. That’s why the early Christians rescued and adopted baby girls that were left on Roman doorsteps to die. They established hospitals in peoples’ homes. They resigned from warfare positions in the Roman army because they wanted to love their enemies, not kill them. They also had very high sexual standards. They believed in the restoration of marriage as it was in God’s original design: monogamous, with no multiple wives for political purposes of advancing the family through diplomatic marriages, heterosexual, loving, with no adultery and very little divorce. Suddenly men couldn’t divorce their wives on a whim. They had to love and be faithful to one wife each. So the early Christians lived lives of purity and justice. The saying that circulated around Christian men was, ‘We share all things but our wives.’ It was a total check on the power of men.

Sexual ethics and social justice go together, absolutely in either case. Have one, have the other; don’t have one, don’t have the other. It’s consistent. So here’s a chart comparing the two stories:

Greco-Roman Story	Christian Story
The immortal, good soul wants to escape the bad physical body	We were created good, both body and soul
Expected ‘disembodiment’ – the separation of soul from body	Expected ‘resurrection’ – the renewal of the physical world, including our bodies; God’s true humanity will be raised from the dead
Death is inevitable and is the end; no one comes back from the dead (cf. Homer)	Death is the enemy of God’s good creation; it will be overthrown in a fresh new creation
Caring for the poor is not important since the body is not important	Caring for the poor is important because people’s bodies are important
Caring for other people-groups is irrelevant (elite vs. barbarian)	Caring for other people-groups is fundamental (universal concern)
Sexuality – where does it come from? Who knows?	Humans were created into marriage: monogamous, heterosexual, loving and with no pre-marital sex, adultery, desertion, or divorce
Have sex with anyone since the body is not important (e.g. Greek Epicureans)	Sexual ethics are important because Jesus is restoring us to God’s creation story

That is impressive. You have to ask, ‘Why would anyone invent the Christian story?’ I mean, I could totally understand the Greco-Roman story. Heck, if people didn’t have to care for the poor and could have sex with anyone they wanted, AND they had all the metaphysical elements of a bigger story to support them in that lifestyle, who wouldn’t choose that? What MALE wouldn’t? Once again, if a story can be explained by sociology, then it’s probably just a myth designed to legitimate the sociology. If a story can’t be explained by sociology, then it’s probably true.

Engagement Between Two Stories: The Christian Story and the Atheist Evolution Story

Now we've laid a foundation. That's going to be important as we evaluate the Christian story and the atheist evolution story. Let me state the obvious, that the atheist evolutionary story is a STORY. It goes like this: Fourteen billion years ago, the universe began. Five billion years ago, the earth formed. Then life began out of non living chemicals and produced human beings. There are variations within atheism about where that story went. For simplicity's sake, I'm going to engage with Enlightenment atheists. The reason for this is because of their emphasis on individualism, which is generally accepted in the West. Rousseau said that the individual 'noble savage' existed in a good 'state of nature' until the 'state of society.' In other words, the individual is real, all other relationships are contracts or social constructs. John Stuart Mill said something similar, as did others. Sometime during the 1700's, the English word 'i' became uniformly capitalized to 'I'¹ In Spanish, by contrast, 'you' (Usted) is capitalized and 'I' (yo) is not. But in English, it's the opposite. 'I' am capitalized and 'you' are not. That pretty much says it all, doesn't it? Relationships and society are important, but the individual most of all. Then, perhaps the story goes, there was America in the 1960's. Isn't that when we got racial justice and the sexual revolution? After all, wasn't that the decade of 'individual rights,' where I as an individual could just feel the shackles of both institutional racism and traditional morality falling to the ground? I could then do whatever I want. We think that sex and social justice go together in the sense that they are both under girded by the idea of 'individual rights.'

Atheistic Evolution Story (especially Enlightenment individualism)
Unexplained origin of universe, earth, life
Human beings are merely physical, chemical beings; our souls really don't factor in
Life's goal is the survival of species; relationships are social constructs
Sex is pleasurable but ultimately functional, for the survival of the species.
Individual rights were finally developed in the European Enlightenment, finally providing a firm foundation for justice

Now there are difficulties with this view. I'll skip over the first line, whether the universe began from nothing or whether life began from chemicals, though those should be topics for another time. I'd like to talk about the view of people.

Look at the second line: This story does the opposite of the Greco-Roman story. It values bodies but not souls. You are just the result of random chemicals. If you really believe that, then drugs and chemicals are ultimately the answer. If you feel depressed or lonely, just take serotonin. If you want to get better grades, just take ritalin. What matters is not your natural limits, or the root cause of pain in your soul, or the quality of your relationships. What matters is just your biochemistry. Now drugs might help in limited ways and for limited purposes. But is it just the chemical experience of our bodies that matters? Sadly, more and more psychiatrists seem to think so; they are prescribing lots of drugs but are doing very little counseling nowadays. The drug industry really likes this story. That's why, if you're an atheist, *opium is the religion of the people*. But is the basic story true?

Look at the second and third lines. Darwin gave support to the idea that relationships were important, but only matter insofar as they serve the greater goal of reproduction. Romance is just a biochemical

¹ The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology (Wilson, 1988, ISBN 0-8242-0745-9) says: "~I~ pron. 1137 i; later I (about 1250, in *The Story of Genesis and Exodus*); developed from the unstressed form of Old English (about 725) ic singular pronoun of the first person (nominative case). Modern and Middle English I developed from earlier i in the stressed position. I came to be written with a capital letter thereby making it a distinct word and avoiding misreading handwritten manuscripts. In the northern and midland dialects of England the capitalized form I appeared about 1250. In the south of England, where Old English ic early shifted in pronunciation to ich (by palatalization), the form I did not become established until the 1700's (although it appears sporadically before that time)."

experience inside your head. And sex? Well, sex according to Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, is this: ‘Sex is the gene’s means of creating more genes.’ Is it true that individuals are real and relationships are just social constructs? Is it true that sex is ultimately functional? I don’t think so. In fact, the story begins to unravel here, too. For example, if atheistic evolution is true, then POLYGAMY would be more normative. After all, where does the idea of monogamous, lifelong marriage come from? Does it come from MEN? Do MEN have an interest in promoting lifelong monogamy? Not at all.

Anthropologists and historians have struggled to explain this, and no theory satisfies. TIME magazine a few years ago did an article on ‘Infidelity – is it in our genes?’ along these same lines. Why would men endorse the idea of monogamous, lifelong marriage? It’s against our interests. So if men really wrote the Bible, as atheists claim, wouldn’t we be reading about Adam and Eve, Eva, and Evelyn? But it doesn’t say that. Whenever polygamy does appear in the Bible, it’s critiqued as sin. Take David and Bathsheba, for instance. And we can also tell that monogamy has existed for as long as human beings have, and that it is seen as somehow normative even when the practice doesn’t measure up. Even in mythology, we see it. When Zeus cheats on Hera, he starts trouble; yes, adultery happens, but the moral of the story is *he never should have cheated!* We have no explanation for this except to say that monogamous lifelong marriage comes hardwired into us. IT WAS GIVEN TO US, AND WE WERE GIVEN TO IT. We can resist it or fail it, but we can never shake it off. Perhaps GOD won’t let us?

Look at the fourth line. If it’s true that only individual rights matter, then our descendents really don’t matter because they’re not individuals yet. Jewish and Christian scholars have noticed that God builds human community across time. Our ancestors and descendents get a vote, so to speak, in a democracy across time. This is what the West just has not been able to deal with. This is why the West pushes off environmental pollution to the future, government deficits to the future, the energy crisis to the future, and so on. It’s *taxation without representation across time*. Is that fair?

Furthermore, taken as a whole, I doubt you can really live in the atheist evolutionary story. Not even Peter Singer, the Princeton philosopher, could. When Peter Singer’s mother contracted Alzheimer’s Disease, what did he do? He took her in. Now some reporters approached him and said, ‘Look, Dr. Singer, we’ve read all your books. And if this were someone else’s mother, you would have said to euthanize her. There is societal cost or pain to supporting mentally handicapped people or the elderly. Since they are a burden to society, and since they themselves may know comparatively less pain, it is morally justifiable to euthanize them. If what really mattered is just the survival of the species, no one is threatened by the elimination of a few old or mutated genes. Why are you creating an exception for yourself? How can you do that?’ And he said, ‘Well, you have to understand, she’s my mother.’ Well of course!!! I should hope so! There is something in us that wants to live in a bigger story, a story in which ALL OUR LIVES have more meaning than this, where ALL RELATIONSHIPS have inherent meaning. My point is not whether Peter Singer is a good example of someone in the atheist evolution story – there are others. My point is not that you will be unjust if you live in that story – you could be very just but you’ll be searching for a real reason to be that way. My point is that NO ONE CAN TRULY LIVE IN A STORY LIKE THAT. And over time, your own story will irk you.

Another example: Sigmund Freud couldn’t live that way either. If love is a construct, if relationships are a construct, and sex is all that really matters, then love and relationships are not rational and not real. So when Freud was dying, he said to his wife, ‘Come and love me, irrationally.’ He wanted something that he knew was love, but he thought there is no such thing, really. But he wanted it anyway. So he couldn’t live in his own story. NO ONE CAN LIVE IN THAT STORY.

Is there an alternative story? Yes. Does it explain real history in a way that is academically respectable? Yes. Let me compare the Christian story to the Atheistic Evolution story in this chart.

Atheistic Evolution Story (especially Enlightenment individualism)	Christian Story
Unexplained origin of universe, earth, life	God created universe, earth, life
Human beings are merely physical, chemical beings; our souls really don’t factor in	Human beings are physical and spiritual
Life’s goal is the survival of species; relationships	Life’s goal is honoring God; relationships are given

are important, but social constructs	and ordered by God
Sex is pleasurable individually but ultimately functional, for the survival of the species.	Sex takes its meaning from being located in God's original ideal for human marriage: monogamous, heterosexual, loving, with no pre-marital sex, adultery, desertion, or divorce
Individual rights were finally developed in the European Enlightenment, providing a 'firm foundation' for justice	Individuals have responsibilities to God concerning how to treat others.

First line: God created the universe, earth, human life. It could have been at 14 billion, 5 billion, and 150,000 years ago, respectively – that's fine; the Bible isn't specific about when those things happened, so there's no conflict about dates. Perhaps God used the evolutionary process in some sense – that's possible, too. The conflict is about God. We also have conflict on the second line: Human beings are physical and spiritual, not just physical. Third line: Life's goal is honoring God; relationships are given and ordered by God. That means they are real, and special, and have some kind of eternal significance. Fourth line: Sex takes its meaning from being located in marriage, God's original ideal for it in Genesis 1 and 2 being monogamous, heterosexual, loving, with no pre-marital sex, adultery, desertion, or divorce. Or else, to the best that I can tell in the other story, it seems to lose its meaning. You may want your partner to be sexually faithful to you, but I'm not sure on what basis. If relationships are just social constructs, then sex isn't sacred. Faithfulness might be your preference, but it's not more than a preference.

Let me pause on that one. I am not saying that this definition should be public policy; in fact I'm a moderate left of center person on the issue of gay marriage. After all, Christians don't legislate against pre-marital sex, adultery, divorce, and all the other aberrations from God's ideal. And within the Christian story, it takes God to empower people to even live for the ideal, so we can't expect people without God to be able to do so. But I am saying that the Christian view of sexuality is academically respectable. Why? Because sexual freedom is a protected category in our culture because of Enlightenment individualism, the view that all relationships are social constructs. But there is reason for us to not believe that. In fact, Enlightenment philosophy became a rogue discipline that tried to lead the other disciplines, like history and the sciences. It totally blundered over history. Rousseau said the individualistic 'noble savage' in the 'state of nature' stepped into the 'state of civilization.' Well, when was that?!? When did we not have monogamy? When did we not have families? When were we 'noble individuals'? **SO THE SECULAR IDEA OF INDIVIDUALISM IN SEXUAL EXPRESSION IS NOT MORE ACADEMICALLY RESPECTABLE THAN THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SEXUAL EXPRESSION. IN FACT, IT IS PROBABLY LESS SO.**

The fifth line: In the biblical story, it's not so much that individuals have rights, as that we have responsibilities. Neither the Old nor the New Testaments say, 'We believe these truths to be self-evident, that all men [and women] are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.' In fact, the view of the Bible is that God calls each human being to be connected to Jesus and demonstrate a particular moral character, the character of Jesus. So individuals have responsibilities *to God*, concerning *other people*, but the responsibility is first and foremost *to God*. That's very different from saying that the rights reside in us. That means that Christians owe love to others, like the handicapped or people with less potential, not because of what others can or can't do, but because God commands it of the Christian. It's the difference between being an employee doing a small job for a large company versus being a member of a great family whose whole character and legacy is love.

That's why it's so important to point out that the Civil Rights Movement for social justice was led by the Black American community, which was communal and quite Christian. That is why Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others started to speak out against poverty and the Vietnam War, and not just about racism in the U.S. Their politics was not just Black-centric, but a larger one that became larger and larger. Why? Because they were living in the Christian story, and they felt a responsibility to challenge the growing pockets of wealth in the black community (something that was controversial) but also America's foreign policy (very controversial). Whereas the hippie movement for sexual freedom was led by a segment of the White American community, which was influenced by the individualistic atheist evolution story, and was very self-centered. What happened in the TV show *Family Ties* with the young Michael J.

Fox? Those hippies in the 70's became the yuppies of the 80's. Did we get more social justice out of them? Under Reagan?? No: Their concerns became smaller and smaller because they were really about themselves to begin with. Your story matters, because your story shapes your ethics.

Let me sum up. Why do sexual ethics and social justice go together? Because they both have to do with life and relationships. They link the future and the present, the soul and the body, individual and community, intimate relations and broader social relations. The key to holding it all together, I think, is your story. So what is your story? We've looked at the classical stories and the contemporary stories. The Christian story and the Atheist individualist story, broadly speaking, are both challenging. There are some things to really think through on both sides. I think the atheist story will eventually irk you; it'll bug you, because it doesn't actually accomplish what it purports to. Not only do we have to ask, 'What story is more believable?' but 'What story is more livable?' and ultimately, 'What story is true?' If we want to be truly human, we have to choose first and foremost which story we will live in.

So I want to invite you to make one of two decisions. The first decision would be to switch stories. Perhaps you are over here on the left in the Enlightenment Atheist story. I invite you to switch stories and enter the Christian story. You can come up to talk to me or talk to a friend who brought you about how to do that. Or, the second decision would be to stop mixing and matching stories. For some of you, Christians included, you'd like to believe that you can mix and match. Say you like the idea of a loving God, but you really want to do whatever you want with your sex life and your money. Well, you can't have it both ways and be intellectually honest. These stories don't mix. So for those of you who like to do that, I invite you to stop mixing and matching, and finally decide.

Debrief

Let me tell you why I think you need to learn to do evangelism this way, based on Acts 17:18 – 34. ¹⁸ And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, 'What would this idle babbler wish to say?' Others, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,'--because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?' ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.' ²¹ (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) ²² So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³ For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'to an unknown god.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' ²⁹ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.' ³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, 'We shall hear you again concerning this.' ³³ So Paul went out of their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

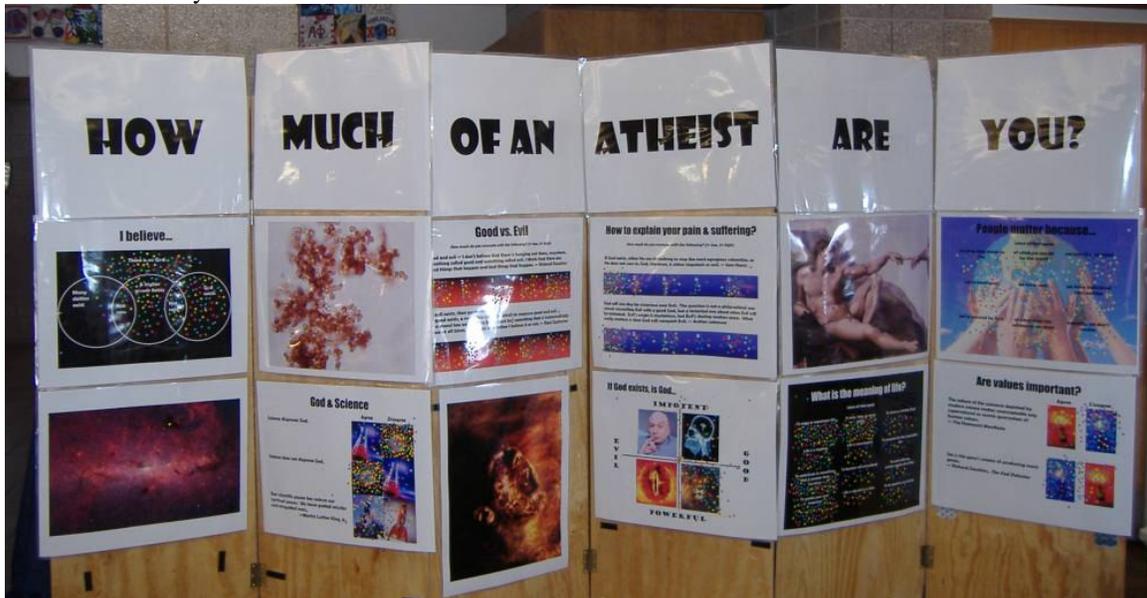
1. Evangelism is a careful appreciation of another story. You need to think very carefully about the story other people tell, especially by the West but also by other peoples who don't identify themselves with that story. And you find points of commonality, like I said last night about the 'altar to an unknown god.' Be affirming of as much as possible. In this case, I said I really respect other people's concerns about sex and social justice. I think it's right to be concerned about those things. But:

2. Evangelism is also a careful criticism of another story. First, Paul talks about resurrection. The Greeks hated the idea. Homer said, 'No one ever comes back from the dead.' Yet in v.18, 'he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.' Then in v.31, he says that God raised Jesus from the dead. In v.32, that's what the Athenians key in on, 'Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer.' Even though the Stoics and Epicureans didn't like the body, hated the idea of bodily resurrection, Paul puts that right in the center. He says, 'There's a big difference here between us.'

Second, Paul says, 'We are all descended from one ancestor.' The Athenians didn't believe that. They thought they were descended from a different ancestor, making their humanity different from the humanity of other people. They thought they were superior. It was a form of racism. Paul challenges that directly, not just because it doesn't jibe with the biblical story of Adam, but because it would have really bad ethical consequences if the Athenians became Christians and still believed that. They wouldn't be able to love others and be united with others different from them. Paul cannot hide that from them as he does evangelism. In fact, he doesn't want to.

Third, Paul quotes from their story again in v.28, but this time to challenge them. He quotes from Epimenides of Crete in the phrase 'For in Him we live and move and exist.' He then quotes from Aratus, a Stoic philosopher, 'For we also are His children.' Paul's argument is, 'Hey, if we are descended from your gods, then why aren't we made out of gold, silver, or stone?' Your story doesn't match up with reality. There are some holes here.

I want to give you one example of how I've done that with students. This is a large display that I've used at Tufts University. It's 6 feet tall and 12 feet wide. It's called 'How Much of an Atheist Are You?'



What we do is we invite students to do a survey. We give them sticker dots, and they go left to right to answer some questions. It starts with what do you believe is out there? What does science tell us? How then do you explain good and evil? How do you explain your own pain and suffering? What is the meaning of life? Why are humans important? And are values real? We surveyed 200 people over 4 days in a dining hall and campus center. We had great conversations, and 17 people showed up to a LG event. Three people started going to church as a result. But let me show you in more detail what people's responses were:



Yesterday, we talked about how Paul affirms something they know, the altar to an unknown god, their quest for truth. In the same way, we can affirm things about people today: what they've experienced with an unknown God, but also what their quest for goodness, love, justice, beauty, and community means. They've been searching for God. But at the same time, we must warn people that their lives won't be the same. Thus:

3. Evangelism is the beginning of discipleship. What did the Athenians need to learn in order to live as Christians? They needed to honor the body and others' bodies. They needed to love others, even those they called 'barbarian.' They needed to quit their idolatry. Where did Paul learn to do evangelism? From Jesus. How did Jesus do evangelism? By calling people to follow him in loving their enemies, being radically generous, forgiving others, and on and on. He evangelized them by calling them into discipleship. In our day and age, new Christians need to be disciplined quickly, perhaps immediately, in areas of sex and social justice. Why? Because they'll be challenged in those areas immediately. But also because Jesus restores us to God's view of sex and social justice. Which leads me to the last point:

4. Evangelism is the open comparing of stories. We must highlight the worldview differences between Christianity and other worldviews. Not to be obnoxious, but (1) simply to be honest, because their lives will be different with Jesus, and it's not like we can hide it and it's not like we should hide it; and (2) to gently challenge them and say that they don't actually live within their own story; their own story doesn't give them what they want. We can say this: 'Like you, we also want goodness, love, justice, beauty, and community. I really admire how you've pursued those things, but I don't think your story will give it to you. And like you, we want sex and social justice to be meaningful. I don't think your story makes them meaningful. I think Jesus gives them profound meaning in his story. Can I tell do a head to head comparison of stories with you?'

How Are Sex and Social Justice Tied Together? A Comparative Approach

Handout – A Comparison of Stories

Greco-Roman Story	Christian Story
The immortal, good soul wants to escape the bad physical body	We were created good, both body and soul
Expected ‘disembodiment’ – the separation of soul from body	Expected ‘resurrection’ – the renewal of the physical world, including our bodies; God’s true humanity will be raised from the dead
Death is inevitable and is the end; no one comes back from the dead (cf. Homer)	Death is the enemy of God’s good creation; it will be overthrown in a fresh new creation
Caring for the poor is not important since the body is not important	Caring for the poor is important because people’s bodies are important
Caring for other people-groups is irrelevant (elite vs. barbarian)	Caring for other people-groups is fundamental (universal concern)
Sexuality – where does it come from? Who knows?	Humans were created into marriage: monogamous, heterosexual, loving and with no pre-marital sex, adultery, desertion, or divorce
Have sex with anyone since the body is not important (e.g. Greek Epicureans)	Sexual ethics are important because Jesus is restoring us to the Genesis creation story

Atheistic Evolution Story (especially Enlightenment individualism)	Christian Story
Unexplained origin of universe, earth, life	God created universe, earth, life
Human beings are merely physical, chemical beings; our souls really don’t factor in	Human beings are physical and spiritual
Life’s goal is the survival of species; relationships are important, but social constructs	Life’s goal is honoring God; relationships are given and ordered by God
Sex is pleasurable individually but ultimately functional, for the survival of the species.	Sex takes its meaning from being located in God’s original ideal for human marriage: monogamous, heterosexual, loving, with no pre-marital sex, adultery, desertion, or divorce
Individual rights were finally developed in the European Enlightenment, providing a ‘firm foundation’ for justice	Individuals have responsibilities to God concerning how to treat others.