



## COHERENCE THEORY

Week 4

**GOD CLASHES**  
with athens.

# GOD CLASHES

WITH ATHENS

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?"

"Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

- Romans 11:33-36

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever

-Westminster Shorter Catechism

## Review of Week 3

1. Man was made to worship
2. Christianity is dying and that's not a bad thing..
3. "Every one of us even from his mother's womb is a master craftsman of idols" - John Calvin
4. "You don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have" - Tim Keller

## Paul's encounter in Athens

- Athens in its prime was probably the greatest city to have ever existed. Especially its philosophy and culture
- Almost every building there was named after some god or was a shrine to a god
  - Great temple of Athena (the Parthenon)
  - The Erechtheion (dedicated to multiple deities)
  - Temple to goddess Roma and emperor Augustus
  - Petronius' satirical assertion - it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens
- the Areopagus where Paul spoke means "hill of Mars" and was dedicated to Mars the Greek god of war. It is also called Mars hill and it rises around 377 feet above land and is near the agora (marketplace) and acropolis.
- Mars Hill was where meetings took place for the courts. It was the highest court for criminal and religious matters
- All other parts of world directed by its thought
- The greatest orators who ever lived spoke in Athens (Socrates, Aristotle, Plato)
- Two major philosophical groups Paul interacts with:

## 1. Stoics

1. Pantheistic. Everything is divine and everyone treated like gods
2. Fatalism and determinism
3. God is the worlds soul
4. The goal was to rise above all things and not feel any emotions to pain or pleasure
5. Philosophy was the way of life
6. Ethics is most important
7. The poem “Invictus” is example
8. Todays paganism (oneism)

## 2. Epicureans

1. Live it up because tomorrow we die.
  - What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” - *1 Corinthians 15:32*
  - Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine : “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.” - *Isaiah 22:14*
2. Materialists so rejected supernatural intervention
3. Was originally a challenge against platonism but later major proponent of Stoicism
4. Everything happens by chance
5. No one running the show
6. Rationalism
7. Death was the end of everything
8. Very much like diests
9. Pleasure is the main purpose of life for epicureans
  - *I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. The supporters of this system claimed that it embodied the meaning - the Christian meaning, they insisted - of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever.*
  - *Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means: An Inquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization (English Writer 1894 - 1964 besat known for “Brave New World”)*

- When I was young I thought that money was the most important thing in life; now that I am old I know that it is. - Oscar Wilde(Irish writer and Poet 1854 - 1900)

10. Existentialism

11. Algernon Charles Swinburne - "The Garden of Proserpine"

*From too much love of living,  
From hope and fear set free,  
We thank with brief thanksgiving  
Whatever gods may be  
That no life lives for ever;  
That dead men rise up never;  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea.*

*Then star nor sun shall waken,  
Nor any change of light:  
Nor sound of waters shaken,  
Nor any sound or sight:  
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,  
Nor days nor things diurnal;  
Only the sleep eternal  
In an eternal night.*

12. Todays modern Epicurean ideas can be seen in Atheistic materialist and people who are just indifferent and care more about pleasure

### 3. Acts 17:16 - 34.

- Paul situation
  1. Was persecuted in Thessalonica and had to leave
  2. Was persecuted and had to flee Berea
  3. Was in Athens all alone waiting for companions (Silas and Timothy)
- When Paul saw all the idols in the city his spirit was provoked
  1. Provoked or Stirred (greek: paraxuno) - to exasperate, to burn with anger, to irritate, arouse to anger
  2. Paul was all about the glory of God and he had a zeal to see him glorified.
    - So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. - *1 Cor. 10:31*
    - For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. -*2 Cor. 4:15*
    - Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, - *Phil. 2:9*

- for zeal for your house consumes me,  
and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.  
- *Psalm 69:9*

Paul's zeal was like that of Christ's

- Jesus Cleanses the temple  
And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." -*John 2:16-17*
- Paul always started with the Jews and then went to the gentiles  
Notice that Paul reasoned with the Jews from Scripture(Acts 17:2). It was his custom
  - Reasoned (greek:dialegomai) - To ponder in ones mind, the converse or discuss
- Some of the Epicurian and Stoic philosophers called Paul a babbler
  1. Babbler (greek: spermologoß) - picking up seed, getting a living by flattery and buffoonery. One who just tosses seeds around. The idea is one who picks at ideas like a chicken pecks at seeds and then spits them off without fully understanding them
  2. They did not take him very seriously.
- Some of the crowd were thinkers who just liked to hear new ideas
- Paul addresses the fact that they are religious
- Paul then takes the sculpture to the unknown god and shows them the true God  
Paul presents God and the gospel (established an entire worldview framework before he presents Christ or else they would not have understood)
  - Paul takes them back to the Genesis account. God made everything. He is not part of everything as oneism would say. He made everything and is above everything. He is above all things made by hand and was most likely pointing out all of the shrines and temples in Athens to different gods. This idea of God making all things went against the Stoic idea that all was divine. The Epicureans were probably at this point not so thrown off. Paul also mentions adam and how all mankind comes from adam. This would have resonated with stoics because they put large emphasis on humanity and ethics.
  - Paul Quotes their own philosophers
    1. «In him we live and move and have our being» - The him to Zeus by epimenides (around 600 BC)
    2. «For we are indeed his offspring» - Phaenomena by the stoic poet Aratus (315. - 240 bc)
  - Pauls Call to repentence
    1. After explaining who God is and telling them the God who creates all other things (twoism - Creator/creation distinction), he then makes a call to repentance (the gospel call). Gods judgement and the time of his judgement is told.
    2. **Paul showed that history is linear. The dominant Greek view on history is that it is cyclical. That goes back to week 2 and premodern vs oneism**
    3. Paul proclaims Christ as being the one who is appointed to judge and who rose from the dead

- 1. Now the epicureans are thrown off because they do not believe in life after death. To them life ended at the physical death. They started to mock Paul
- 4. Paul was cut short after bringing up the resurrection from the dead
- The thinkers procrastinate. This is bad. The time is now...For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. - 2 Cor. 6:2
- Dionysius was a judge of the Areopagus and was converted to Christianity and was said to have become the first bishop of Athens according to Eusebius

## What now? (Implication)

- The apostle Paul was alone in Athens. As the missiologist Michael Frost says we are exiles in a post Christian Context.
 

As "Exiles" we as Christians always need to go back to the most important story and that is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We need to go back to the gospel that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). We can not rely on government to be "Christian" or to support us, we cannot rely on society to be a defender of the Christian faith. We need to always go back to the gospel.
- When the Jews were in exile in Babylon, they always went back to the most important story in their history - the exodus. They were reading and discussing the exodus while they were in exile under another group the Babylonians. The Jews spoke of God reigning and being king although everything around them would say the opposite. Christians tend to grow when under persecution. Just look at the early church fathers who were being martyred for their faith but the Christian Church grew and eventually Rome adopted it.
  1. Persecution ->
  2. **"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**  
- Matt. 5:11-12 (Jesus)
  3. **Never did the church so much prosper and so truly thrive as when she was baptized in the blood. The ship of the church never sails so gloriously along as when the bloody spray of her martyrs falls on her deck. We must suffer and we must die, if we are ever to conquer this world for Christ. -Charles Spurgeon**
  4. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion "your God reigns! - Isaiah 52:7
- Paul saw through the cultural facade straight to the idols all around him and he became angry

We need to have a zeal for God like that of Paul and we need to always be in awe of Gods glory and his Holiness.

- Isaiah was crushed when he Saw Gods glory and holiness. We need to always pray for his presence in our lives that his magnificence will always be true in our lives - Isaiah 6:1-7
- That being said when we are out in the world we need to ask the questions what motivates people? What are peoples idols? What do these people care about?
- Paul engaged the culture around him that was much like ours today. We must engage the world. Be in the world but not of it.
1. A great example of engaging culture is Jesus in John 4. Back in those days the cultural norm for a Jew was to not go through Samaria because the Samaritans were “unclean” to them. Because when the Assyrians controlled the northern kingdom they interbred with the Jews making the Samaritans and this was a big uncleanness to the Jewish people. Jesus was going from Judea to Galilee and Samaria is directly on the way but Jews would intentionally go around Samaria which makes the trip much longer but they hated the Samaritans so they were willing to make the longer trip. Jesus went straight through Samaria.
    - Jesus crossed two big cultural barriers of that time:
      1. Spoke to a Samaritan
      2. The Samaritan was a woman
  2. Paul was not ignorant of the culture around him. We need to understand the culture around us and use that understanding as we share the gospel in a post Christian context.
    - There needs to be credibility and not ignorance
    - Paul was well versed:
      1. Was a Jew and a Pharisee so he was an expert in the law. So when he reasoned with the Jews he knew what they thought
      2. He was a roman citizenship
      3. Special knowledge of military and politics
      4. He was Greek by heritage
      5. He was exposed to Greek art and philosophy
      6. He was cosmopolitan in every sense
      7. Well read and well travelled
    - Paul quoted pagan philosophers back at the Athenians and used those quotes to say they pointed back to God!! Brilliant. John did the same thing in the book of John when he talked about the Logos becoming flesh. John came at the Jews with what they would know which is the Genesis account (In the beginning) and then the gentiles with Logos (the Word)
      1. Logos was thought to originate from the pre-socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535 - 475 BC) who was a native of the Greek city Ephesus (it was Greek then)
        1. To him the Logos gave rational discourse to the world's rational structure
        2. an independent existence of a universal logos
      2. Logos was an important term in Philosophy to mean “a ground”, “a word”, “a reason”,

“word”, “speech”

3. The stoics took the logos as the active “reason” behind what was animating the universe.  
to the stoics all humans possessed a certain portion of the divine logos
  4. Philo adopted the term into Jewish philosophy
  5. The term is used in modern non Biblical ways in the analytical thoughts of Carl Jung and sufism(the mystical dimensions of Islam)
- We are to love others

Humans are made in the image of God (Imago Dei) and we need to remember this when we are in the world. This is something I find myself forgetting all the time and I catch myself and the prejudices I carry when I look at certain people. Not always race, but can be social status that we frown down on. It is very easy for us to get frustrated when we are confronted with another worldview. I tend to put up defenses really fast and forget that the person I am talking to is a person made in the image of God. We are to love God and love others. Not always easy to love others. Do we really love the unsaved or do they irritate us?

1. **“Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.”**

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

2. **“Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world.”**

Francis Schaeffer

- Stand firm in the truth in a culture that does not care about ultimate truths. Let your lives reflect the truth of the gospel

1. Be Watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong - *1 Cor. 16:13*

2. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm - *Ephesians 6:13*

3. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel - *Phil 1:27*

4. **“A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God’s truth is attacked and yet would remain silent.”**

John Calvin

5. **“How Can someone say he loves God but not care about truth” - RC Sproul (5 things every Christian needs to grow)**

- It will cost us to live missionaly

1. Paul was mocked from all sides in Athens. All through Acts 17 he was being hit, The Jews in Thessalonica, the same Jews in Borea, The stoic and epicurean philosophers. People will mock us too

2. It takes time. Many Christians spend their entire lives in relationships to slowly see change or maybe won’t even see the fruit. This is emotionally draining. When our work of the gospel in society doesn’t seem to be “sticking” at all this can let us down.

- Love within the body of believers is the ultimate apologetic. When unbelievers see the love that we have

for one another then they are curious about what causes this love.

- In a post modern/oniesm culture relationships are more important than truths so when they see the strong relationships we have for each other it is a strong witness. The divisions and strife within the church does the opposite
  1. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another - *John 13:35*
  2. That there may be no division within the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another - *1 Cor. 12:25*
  3. Love one another with brotherly affection Outdo one another in showing honor - *Romans 12:10*
  4. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers - *1 John 3:16*
- Look at the 12 disciples. **Simon the zealot** who would stab someone if they were conspiring with the oppressor (in this case Rome) and is about overthrowing the dominating forces. He would have stabbed **Levi (Matthew)** the tax collector who in those days was like the Bernie Madoff of the world. Bernie Madoff was convicted in 2009 in a ponzi scheme the defrauded billions of dollars. He stole around 65 billion dollars and then Madoff lived off of the money that other lost which most likely was their life savings. Think how many people feel about Madoff and this is how the hatred ran for Levi. Then you had **Batholomew** who was most likely of noble birth, you had **Andrew and Peter** who were uneducated fisherman. How diverse these people were but Jesus chose them to be his disciples.
- Prayer and renewing of our minds in Gods word (seems obvious but many of us are weak in this area)
  1. **To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible then to be alive without breathing - Martin Luther**
  2. **Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire? - Corrie ten Boom**
  3. Rejoice always, pray continuously and give thanks in all circumstances - *1 Thess: 5:16-17*
  4. Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind - *Romans 12:2*
  5. We need to be always preaching the gospel to ourselves. We should spend our entire lives learning the gospel.

## 5. Questions/Comments

## 6. Prayer

**Be Exalted, Oh God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! - *Psalm 57:4-6***

## **Further Reading**

Michael Frost Video (Evangelism in Post Christian Context)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsmjUz6n18c>

John Macarthur sermon on Acts 17(Gods Man confronts satans city)

<http://www.gty.org/resources/bible-book-studies/7114/acts-vol-06>

Tim Keller (The Supremacy of Christ in a postmodern world)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBHT50K7-pl>

Two Ism and the Missional life video with David Fandey

<http://truthxchange.com/media/2012/02/10/rev-david-fandey-two-ism-and-the-missional-life/>

**My Notes:**