

Gamma

Acts 17

Study 15

The Gospel for intellectuals

CASE HISTORY 1

Nandy lived in a large bungalow in Kenny Hills working as a very successful broker with OSK. He was initially not a Christian. He was a fun loving Chinese young man who is handsome and has a number of girlfriends with whom he had regular sexual activity. He has a vague notion about the existence of God and was into some New Age religion where the purpose of life is about enjoying oneself. He was brought to church where he said the sinner's prayer during the HS weekend in Alpha. He then lost his job and contracted an unusual kind of venereal disease and started losing a lot of weight and becoming very tired all the time. When his friends visited him he seemed cheerful so they were surprised and asked how was he able to take all this so well. Nandy explained " I have been doing a lot of bad things in my life you know before I became a Christian and I guess it's only right that I now suffer to atone for all that evil living. " I focus on the simple pleasures of life finding joy in just a cup of coffee or a walk in the park or the pleasure of the company of friends. We talk about our past adventures and discuss politics and the various religions and it makes me happy. I spend a lot of time on meditation when I empty my mind of the distractions and sinful desires of the flesh. I focus on my painful disease see the benefit of it because of it I don't have

to spend so much money clubbing anymore. Because of my disease I am not so attractive to so many false friends who previously hung out with me for my money and not because they cared for me. The disease has made me a stronger and more courageous person and more peaceful. I have down graded to a simple apartment instead of my bungalow and there is now less pressure to go out and make money and let money be by source of self esteem. I am independent and self sufficient and I am sure God will see that this will please Him and He will take me to heaven based on this.

a. Do you think this is a normal Christian response to adversity in a persons life

This is not the normal Christian response to adversity

b. If not why not ? Are there elements of Non Christian philosophical influence?

There are obvious influences of Epicurism when he says he has learnt to readjust his expectations and pleasure sources. He downgrades it to walks in the park or a cup of coffee. Pleasure now consists of fellowship with friends and their long discussions

There are also elements of Stoicism evidenced by his refocusing on meditations in order to change his attitudes towards his painful disease and not the pain of his disease.

His aim seems to be more strength, peace and courage. These are now the virtues to which his sufferings have lead to and these are the goals of his life. These are common Stoic goals.

The independence and self sufficiency are virtues which he can present to God to win merit and salvation which is not what the cross was all

about

- c. Nandy's self esteem was based on his success in his profession and material belongings but now what is it based on ?**

He is now basing it on his own innate virtues and ability to withstand suffering. He also copes with his suffering by believing that he is atoning for his past wrong doings. He has lived a sexually debauched life and now he is rightly paying the price for it. The suffering atones for the sins and that is okay he deserves it and his suffering somehow brings merit because he is saving himself.

- d. If Nandy is a Christian how should he really responds to this event? To help you answer this question lets compare his response to a famous Protestant Reformer in example below**

Ulrich Zwingli the famous Swiss Reformer who broke from the Roman Catholic church also had his life transformed from adversity which came from contracting the Bubonic plague. He survived whilst a major portion of his city perished. Here is an excerpt of a poem he wrote in response to the illness and compare this with Nandy's response and can you discern the difference and draw biblical principles from this great reformers experience

Help me, O Lord, my strength and rock; lo at the door I hear death's knock.

"Uplift Thine arm once pierced for me; that conquered death and set me free.

"Yet if Thy voice in life's midday, Recalls my soul, then I obey.

"In faith and hope earth I resign, secure of Heaven, for I am Thine.

"My pains increase; haste to console; for fear and woe seize body and soul.

"Death is at hand, my senses fail, my tongue is dumb; Now, Christ, prevail.

"Lo! Satan strains to snatch his prey; I feel his grasp; must I give way?

"He harms me not, I feel no loss, for here I lie beneath Thy cross.

"My God! My Lord! Here by Thy hand, upon the earth once more I stand.

"Let sin no more rule over me; my mouth shall sing alone to Thee."

Nandy looks to his own resilience for strength by changing his attitude towards adversity he downgrades his expectations. Zwingli looks to God for tangible help

Help me, O Lord, my strength and rock; lo at the door I hear death's knock.

"Uplift Thine arm once pierced for me; that conquered death and set me free

God is his strength and rock and he asks God for help directly

Zwingli commits his life and ultimate outcome into God's wise hands. He places not insistence that God will heal him. He just throws his fate into His hands

"Yet if Thy voice in life's midday, Recalls my soul, then I obey.

"In faith and hope earth I resign, secure of Heaven, for I am Thine.

The words " recalls my soul ..then I obey " means death

Zwingli's readiness for death and his strength to face this comes from a very tangible source. ...earth I resign ...means he leaves the earth.....secure of heaven ...there is eternal security because I am thine...because he belongs to God. His strength is drawn directly from biblical truth and not from readjustment of attitudes like Nandy.

Nandy applying Stoic philosophy denies the reality of his disease by focusing on the positive out comes like ...he now wastes less money on clubbing and picking fair weather friends.

Zwingli does not deny his pain, he acknowledges and embraces his pain

"My pains increase; haste to console; for fear and woe seize body and soul.

"Death is at hand, my senses fail, my tongue is dumb; Now, Christ, prevail

His pain is increasing he complains to GOD. He is honest with his fear and dread but

asks for Christ to prevail

Zwingli expresses his fears of Satan's temptations

"Lo! Satan strains to snatch his prey; I feel his grasp; must I give way?

"He harms me not, I feel no loss, for here I lie beneath Thy cross.

Yet on the other hand he expresses confidence not on his own innate ability to handle the emotions but on Christ. He is secure in Christ knowing Satan cannot touch him

e. What is the primary difference between the way philosophers deal with adversity and Christians deal with adversity?

All human religious systems and philosophies have in common self righteousness. Where humans do in order to save themselves. It may be good works or sacrifice but it is always human effort. Believing that our puny efforts somehow obligate God to reciprocate with salvation is the biggest lie perpetrated by this.

Christians ever rest completely on the cross , the finished work of Christ for their salvation and basis of self esteem constantly.

Matt 5 tells us of the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit , ie those who recognize their continual spiritual poverty of their own merit which is the only way one can receive Christ's merit.

Once adversity impacts us it is always Christ we turn to we look up when we face trouble. The philosophers will look down in to their own self resources.

Question 1. What six principles (at least) does Paul lay out to show them who the true God is? (vv.24-31)) b) Some people have criticized this sermon as not being Christ-centered enough. How would you answer that? c) How does Paul's message fit this audience (refer to the introduction to the Athenian mission)?

a) Paul has to distinguish the true God from the polytheistic gods and idols of the Greek pantheon. He does so by telling them five things about God:

(1) That God is the Creator of the world (v.24). *“who made the world and everything in it”*. This is a very different that the limited gods of the Greeks (many of whom were born and created themselves), and from the all-pervasive God of eastern religions, who is identical with the life force in all things. Rather this is a God who existed before the world and brought it into being.

(2) That God is therefore transcendent and not dependent on us or the world or anything in it (v.25). *“He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything”*. Again, this contrasts God with idols, and the Greek gods, who need our worship. This is Paul’s warning that the true God cannot be “domesticated” as idols can. In a real sense, God cannot be placated or manipulated, because he needs nothing.

(3) On the other hand, that God is also Lord of history. (v.26) *“He determined the times set for them and the exact places that they should live.”* and very involved with us (v.28) *“For in him we live and move and have our being”*. Though God is transcendent, Paul says he is not remote, but is behind all the circumstances of history and is very near and involved with us.

(4) That God, that God made us for fellowship with him. (v.27) *“God did this so that men would seek him... and find him.”* God wants us to seek him and find him. This is a tremendous statement. Paul is indicating that though God does not need our obedience, he desires to have a relationship with us. This is not like the western gods who only want loyalty, not loving communion; this is not like the eastern “pantheistic” god who can only be sensed and experienced but which is not personal and cannot be spoken to. This is a personal yet all-powerful God. This also implies a very high view of human beings!

(5) That God cannot be worshipped by idols and images. (v.29) Now Paul draws one of his first implications. If God is this great, then he shapes us and we worship him as he wants it to be done. We must not shape him and worship him as we want it to be done. He argues that “we are his offspring” — he created us. How is it then that so many people try to create their own religion? We must remember that modern people are very much in the same tradition as those who made their own statues to worship. Today it is common to hear people say, “I like to think of God as”, or “everyone has to determine what God is for him or herself”. That is idolatry. Of what value would a God be who you shaped yourself? That is Paul’s argument. It still works.

(6) That God has made Jesus Christ Judge of the whole world. (v.30-31). Finally Paul says, up until the first coming of Christ, God has not visited judgement on idolatry as he will in the future. *“In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent”*. Finally, Paul comes to Christ. He says that the resurrection proves that he will return to judge the world.

b) Some people are disappointed that this sermon is not more Christ-centered. But we must remember that Paul had already laid the groundwork in the marketplace about the deity of Christ and the historicity of the resurrection. In other words, he had spoken of the person and work of Christ, but the Athenians did not have a Biblical conception of a transcendent-yet-involved God, a holy-yet-loving God. Without that view of God, the person and work of Christ makes no sense. Now, finally, he connects this God to the career of Jesus. Paul has shown that there is a God of love who seeks our fellowship (v.27), yet a God of justice who must punish us (v.30-31) for trying to manipulate him and rebel against him through idolatry (v.24-25,29). Only if they understand this, does the deity of Christ (that God himself has come to save us) and the work of Christ (the death and resurrection) make any sense. For the work of Christ alone resolves the great tension between the justice of God (he must punish sin) and the graciousness of God (he wants to forgive and restore us to himself). The work of Christ satisfies the justice of God with the love of God.

But why does Paul not spell this out? Why does he not spend more time on Christ in the speech? Here are three possible answers. First, since we know that Luke's record of sermons are always summary-outlines, we may surmise that Paul provided more discussion about the work and especially the death of Christ. But second, it is also possible that the narrative shows us that Paul did not really finish his speech, that it came to an abrupt ending before he could have made further points. *“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered”* (v.32). A third possibility is that Paul simply knew that he had to lay a groundwork first, and he did not try to say everything at once. He began with the doctrine of God. It is true that there were not a lot of converts (v.33), but that does not mean that Paul made any mistakes in his communication.

c) We have been noting all along how Paul's message fit the audience. They lacked a Biblical doctrine of God, so he had to work on that first

before the facts about Christ could make sense to them. We should also notice that the “two sides” of God’s nature that Paul taught cut against both the Epicureans and the Stoics views. The Epicureans saw the gods as personal, but remote and uninvolved with human affairs. They were “happy hedonists”, teaching that life consisted of following your desires. The Stoics on the other hand saw God as a kind of life force controlling everything, but not a personal being to know and obey. They were pessimists, teaching that life consisted of following your duty. To the Epicureans, Paul said, “God is near and he is a Judge — you cannot do anything you want!” To the Stoics, Paul said: “God is personal and Savior — you can know hope and freedom!” He was telling the Epicureans not to make an idol of pleasure, and he was telling the Stoics not to make an idol

Question 2. What is the difference between moral feelings and obligations? How does the latter indicate the existence of God?

Look at this recent incident in Israel and use it to decide if preserving the life of a fallen combatant is a moral obligation or a moral feeling?

Sgt Elor Azaria was sent to trial for shooting a severely wounded Palestinian terrorist. Clearly visible in the video is the injured Sharif, who has already been shot once, his head still moving. After almost two minutes, a soldier approaches Sharif, aims his weapon at his head and shoots him, apparently killing him. Later footage shows him lying motionless with blood coming from his head.

The video appears to confirm in this instance repeated claims by Palestinians and human rights groups in recent months that Israeli security forces have shot and killed suspected attackers who pose no threat.

Is preserving the life of a fallen combatant a moral feeling or a moral obligation?

Moral feelings are feelings that everyone will experience in response to any action. They are as diverse as there are people and cultures. Evolutionists have explained them by posing that our ancestors have found such feelings have survival benefits and hence has been preserved in our cultures and our genes to be propagated.

Moral obligations are universal obligations upon humans as the result of being made in the image of God.

Palestinians have moral feelings n believe the fallen combatant should not have been mercilessly shot.

Israelis are divided and large numbers believe it was permissible to shot the fallen terrorist.

The army and most of the world press believe that it was not permissible for the soldier to mercilessly shoot a fallen wounded terrorist on his own volition and anger ..this is evidence of moral obligation evidence of the existence of God