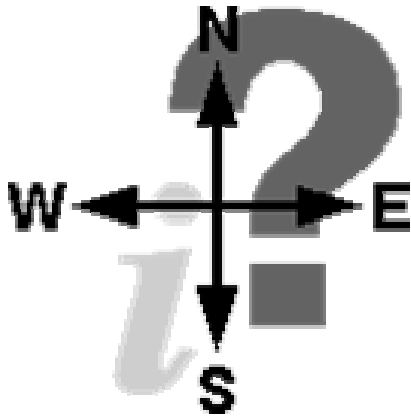


LIFE Community Sermon Notes



What about
other religions?

Acts 17:16-33

16While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

22Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

24"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. 30In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

32When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." 33At that, Paul left the Council. 34A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

LIFE Community Sermon Notes

Sunday, July 1

Big Idea: We can engage with people of other religions by knowing four principles.

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 2:5-6

5For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6who gave himself as a ransom for all men

Opening Question: Share about an experience you had with someone of another faith.

Questions in **bold** below are suggested focus questions.

Sections in *italics* and/or parenthesis are for the leaders notes.

Observation Questions

1. Where is Paul speaking?
2. Who is he speaking to?
3. What are some of the key thoughts or points he makes in his monologue?
4. **What is the conclusion of the Paul's presentation? What effect does it have?** (*This has some impact on the application section and conclusion of the study*)

Interpretation Questions

1. **Why did Paul get so distressed over seeing all the idols?**
2. **What does this tell you about his heart?**
3. What are some key thoughts or theological concepts Paul presents in his monologue?

Application Questions

Paul Borthwick presented four principles for engaging with people of other faiths (*choose one or all of these to discuss*):

1. Respect others in the context of listening.
 - How could you develop the gift of hospitality that Paul Borthwick spoke about in his message as a means to engage with others in a respectful, listening context?
 - What does respect and listening look like for you?
2. Seek understanding in dialogue.
 - How do you do this?
 - What understanding are you looking for? Is this the same as belief and agreement? How is it different?
3. Discern the differences between the beliefs
 - Paul Borthwick suggested developing a set of questions for conversation. Make a list of questions together as a group that you might want to know about another person's faith. (*Some suggestions were: What happens when you die? What is the basis for forgiveness in your faith? How do you explain suffering and evil?*)
4. Remember that the key difference is Jesus Christ and his resurrection.
 - Jesus Christ is the key difference with other religions, specifically the major religions. In the Acts passage we see that Paul's monologue had little effect on those listening. In contrast to other cities, **few** believers came to faith. **Why is that?** (*A good conclusion for this sort of discussion is that we do not argue people into faith, or manipulate them into faith. The forming of a relationship with Jesus Christ*)

LIFE Community Sermon Notes

is the work of the Holy Spirit, which we can engage in through prayer. When we present Jesus Christ to people we rely on the Holy Spirit to work on their hearts and effect change. The engaging conversations with people of other religions and the attitude with which we do this is important, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit and our partnership with that that must be remembered too.)

Close you group time in prayer as you remember the names of people you know of who have other faiths. Make a commitment as a group that you will try to engage with them in the next week in some sort of spiritual conversation.

Leader's Notes

1. This study ends with a suggested practical idea: engage in a conversation with someone you know who has another faith system. The purpose of this engagement should be to practice the principles and not to present our beliefs and thoughts. This might be asking some questions, visiting their place of worship, listening to them speak about their faith. Encourage this as a leader.
2. **Resources**
 - *Sharing the truth in love: How to relate to people's of other faiths.* Ajith Fernando.
 - *Neighboring Faiths.* Winfried Cordman.