

Is Jesus the Only Way?

by David Guzik

Jesus claimed to be the only way to God, and his words are supported by logic and reason.

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Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 6:29, John 8:42, John 14:6, Acts 17:17, Romans 2:16, 1 Corinthians 15:20

Topics: "Christian Apologetics", "Salvation Theology"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenge of representing strong Christian beliefs in a world that passionately disbelieves them. He refers to the example of Paul preaching in Athens in Acts chapter 17 as a pattern for how Christians should deal with different beliefs in today's world. The speaker also highlights the historical dominance of Christianity in the Western world for many centuries. He emphasizes that simply believing in Jesus is not enough, but one must also believe in his atoning work on the cross for salvation. The sermon concludes with a reminder to be good to others and the recognition that while world religions may share some ethical teachings, there are significant differences between them that should not be downplayed.

Transcript

Tonight I want to speak to you on an important topic, and it's important not only from a biblical understanding, but from a cultural understanding. The topic I want to speak to you tonight about can be expressed simply by just asking the question, Is Jesus the only way? It's an often heard disagreement with Christianity. Many people you hear today say something to this effect, Jesus and Christianity are fine, and that's great if you have that way to God.

But I have my own way to God, and the Muslim has his, and the Buddhist has his. All roads lead to God, and we only need to be sincere in seeking Him, and we'll all end up at the same destination. Now, if a Christian objects to that kind of a statement, they're often met with the kind of reply that says something like this, Well, what right do you have to send me to hell just because I don't believe in Jesus the way you do? Well, it's something that really needs to be addressed.

Because I would say that in the minds of most thinking people in our present day culture, this is one of their big objections to biblical Christianity. It's so exclusive. It says my way or the highway.

Jesus or nothing else. And so first of all, we need to ask the question, Is that a fair representation of biblical Christianity? In the eyes of most of the world, the idea is something like this, that God is on top of a

mountain, and we're all seeking Him. And there's many different roads that lead up to the mountain.

And you just need to follow the one that seems right to you. The Hindu's following his road. The Christian's following his road.

The Buddhist is following his road. The sincere moral do-gooder is following his road. The road isn't important.

It's just that you're on the right mountain, and we're all going to end up at the same destination. One Hindu speaker said this, he said, As one can ascend to the top of a house by the means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope, so diverse are the ways and means to approach God, and every religion in the world shows one of those ways. In other words, this is the majority opinion of most people in our culture.

Now, I think, first of all, it's important for us to understand why Americans at the beginning of this century are so in love with this idea, and I would say that it has to do with the effect of something good in our culture. And that good thing is the idea of religious pluralism. Now, pluralism in the religious sense is the belief that all religions are equally valid.

In other words, it's just the belief itself that's important, not so much what the belief is in. And Americans are so influenced by pluralism in regard to religion because we put a very high ideal on the idea that all men are equal before the law. Our Declaration of Independence says, we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

Now, the Declaration of Independence obviously meant this in a legal sense. It's also very self-evident that all men are not created equal in appearance, in intelligence, in personality, in physical makeup, but everybody should be created equal in the eyes of the law. The law shouldn't treat the ugly man any different than it treats the handsome man, or the rich man any different than the poor man, or the tall man any different than the short man, or the influential man any different than it treats the powerless man.

All men and women should be equal before the law. But this idea of an equal standing before the law has developed into an idea that all things are equally true. And that's simply not the case.

Now, we also have a strong belief in the United States, a belief that I'm thankful for, that government and religion should not be too closely connected. That the government should endorse no particular religious belief. In other words, it's not the government's job to make a particular sect of the Baptists the official religion of the United States of America, or a particular sect of the Presbyterians, or the Mormons, or the Roman Catholics.

No, no. It's the government's job to remain neutral on that. Now, I don't believe that it's the government's job to distance itself from all kinds of religious expression.

I think that's a misunderstanding of the Second Amendment. But surely we understand that the government should not endorse any particular religious belief. Now, therefore, in the eyes of some people, this means that the government should say that all religious beliefs are equally valid.

Now again, before the law, the government can't say that. I think Christians should have no business with anything that even smacks in the slightest way of outlawing somebody else's religion. We have no interest in that.

We do not want Christianity to be advanced by the power of law. No. We want Christianity to be advanced by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so the government should just keep its hands off religion, and allow religion's free expression. But we've also been influenced by the 19th century study of comparative religions. How many of you in college had a course in comparative religions? And in that study, you look for the common ground between the world's religions.

And you know what? There really is a lot of common ground between the world's religions. When you study the ethical teaching of every religion, it's virtually the same. Be good to other people.

Be self-disciplined. Be kind to others. The ethical teaching of all world religions is basically the same.

However, we should say this. The study of comparative religions makes a critical error, because it greatly downplays the significant differences between religions. If one religion says, this is black, and another religion says, this is white, the study of comparative religions says, well, isn't it wonderful that these two religions think so highly of colors? Well, but they're very opposite in the way that they look at them.

And so friends, we need to understand that this idea of religious pluralism, that there is no one objectively true religious idea. You have yours, I have mine, they have another, and they're all equally true. This idea is so prevalent in the United States of America, that for somebody to say that what they believe is true, and what somebody else believes is incorrect when it comes to religion, that's highly offensive to some people.

I remember when I was on the streets of a city in Holland a few years back, and we were walking down the street just sort of doing some shopping, it was the city of Harlem, and while we were there, we encountered a couple of men who were Mormon missionaries there in Holland. Now they were from the United States. Matter of fact, one of them came from the San Fernando Valley.

And so we started talking, and I started discussing their religion with them. And I have to say, maybe it was because I was away from home, and I felt that I wasn't hindered by the same restraints perhaps I would feel at home, I got a little hot under the collar with one of these fellows. Because I started saying, well, you know, I just can't agree with your religion.

As a matter of fact, I think it's ridiculous, I told him. And that sounds very offensive to some people. It sounded offensive to this fellow.

And I said, I just cannot believe that you advance the idea that God is just a glorified human being who lives somewhere on a planet called Kolob, and all he does with his time is he spends his time having celestial sex with his numerous spirit wives so they can produce spirit babies so that they can come and be born into the bodies of babies here on earth and populate this earth. And he said, well, sir, you should at least respect my religious beliefs. And that's when I about lost it on the fellow.

I said, listen, I don't have to respect your religious beliefs. I have to allow you the right to have them and to share them. And certainly you have that right.

For a moment, I don't want you to feel that you should be persecuted or that. But you're saying I have to respect that belief about God? It's nonsense. It's ridiculous.

But when I take that sort of attitude, it offends many people. Because their idea is that I have no right to judge the religious belief of another person. All religious beliefs can be equally true.

Holsters asked for a response to this statement. Here's the statement. There is no such thing as absolute truth.

Different people can define different truth in conflicting ways and still be correct. Only one out of six adults, that's 16%, strongly disagreed with that statement. In other words, you could say it's black, they could say it's white, and everybody's correct.

Only one out of six people strongly disagreed with that. Ladies and gentlemen, 59% of church attenders agreed with the idea that two people can hold contradictory ideas and they can both be true. So friends, we're faced with this very critical idea.

Is Jesus the only way? Now I'll admit something. If we believe that Jesus is the only way towards God, then many people will categorize us as being narrow-minded and bigoted towards other people. And I want you just to hold on that idea because later on in my address tonight, I'll address that idea.

Are Christians narrow-minded and are Christians bigoted for believing this? But what I want to address first is just the simple evidence biblically. Did Jesus claim to be the only way? And so perhaps you could open up your Bibles right now to the Gospel of John chapter 6. Again, that's John chapter 6. So what I want to do with you right now is just spend a few moments going through some passages from the Gospels and see if Jesus ever claimed to be the exclusive or the only way to God. Many people believe that Jesus never made such a claim and that it's only narrow-minded followers of Jesus that put these words into his mouth.

But let's read for ourselves what Jesus says. John chapter 6 beginning at verse 28. That's an excellent question, isn't it? We want to do the works God wants us to do.

So how do we do it? What do we do, Jesus? This was Jesus' reply in verse 29. That's a pretty radical statement, isn't it? If you want to do God's work, Jesus says, Believe in me. I'm the one that the Father sent.

Believe in me. Or how about the Gospel of John chapter 8, verse 42. Here's another example of a very bold statement that Jesus makes regarding his being the exclusive way to God.

John chapter 8, verse 42 reads, Ladies and gentlemen, do you realize what Jesus said there in John chapter 8, verse 42? If God is really your Father, then you will love Jesus. You'll follow him. Well, wait a minute.

Can't I be a sincere follower of Mohammed and still love God? Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus says no. Jesus says, if you really love God, if God is your Father, then you will love Jesus. How about John chapter 14, verse 6? This is one of the most famous statements Jesus makes regarding his exclusive character and nature.

And well, it should be famous because it's a very bold statement from Jesus. Listen carefully to what Jesus says. John chapter 14, verse 6. Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Now, can we agree that's a radical statement? You can agree with Jesus or you can disagree with Jesus. But please, let's not act like he didn't say it.

He said it. It's right there. I am the way, not a way, the way.

I am the truth. Not a truth, the truth. I am the life, not a life, the life.

And then if that isn't clear enough, he says, no one comes to the Father except through me. Well, wait a minute. I can come to God through Buddha, can't I? Or the sincere Jewish person says, I can come to God through the law of Moses, can't I? I can come to God through my study of the Book of Mormon, can't I? Jesus says, no one comes to the Father except through me.

The words of Jesus himself say that there are not many roads to God. There is only one road to God and he is it. Ladies and gentlemen, let me say this again.

Jesus didn't say that he pointed to a way. Jesus didn't say that he would direct us to a way. Jesus said he was the way.

You have to come through him. Or as Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7, verses 13 and 14, and just listen as I read this. He said, enter by the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it.

Friends, I think that there's no doubt about it that Jesus claimed strongly and clearly that he was the only way to God. Now might I say that not only do the scriptures and the words of Jesus himself tell us that he's the only way of God, might I say that logic tells us that Jesus is the only way to God. If you won't accept the reasoning of scripture, accept the reasoning of logic.

Let me ask you a question. Is Jesus at least a way to God? Most people would say yes. Isn't that incredible? The Muslim in their faith, they don't reject Jesus.

They honor Jesus as a prophet. Many people in other religions honor Jesus as a prophet. They recognize him as a man from God.

And so they would say, well Jesus is at least a way to God. Well let me ask you a question. Was he a true prophet or a false prophet? Or even this, was Jesus at least an honest man? Just give me that.

Just tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement. Jesus was an honest man. Well ladies and gentlemen, if Jesus was a true prophet or if he was at least even an honest man, then what he said about himself was true.

An honest man doesn't lie about himself. A true prophet certainly does not lie about himself. Therefore, Jesus is the only way to God.

If Jesus said the things that I just told you and we just read from the scriptures themselves that he said, if he said I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. And if Jesus is an honest man or a true prophet, then friends, he's the only way to God. Or let me put it to you in another way.

If Jesus is not the only way to God, then he is not any way to God. If there are many roads to God, if it's true that God is on top of the mountain and there's many different roads that go up the mountain and you can take any one you want, if that is true and you may wish it to be true, if that is the case, then Jesus is not one of those roads. Because Jesus himself said that there was only one road.

And if he's wrong about that, who knows what else he's wrong about. Friends, do you understand what I'm saying? If there are many ways to God, then you have to cross Jesus off of the list and say that he is not one of them. Because he absolutely claimed that he was the only road to God and that he himself was that road.

And ladies and gentlemen, if Jesus was not the only way to God, then he was not an honest man. Then he was most certainly not a true prophet. Then he'd have to be either a madman or a lying devil.

There's no middle ground available to us. Now, if you are bold enough to say that Jesus was a madman or that Jesus was a lying devil, then I ask you simply to do one thing. Read the Gospels.

Read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And then come back to me and look me square in the eye and say Jesus Christ is a madman or Jesus Christ is a lying devil. I don't think you can say it.

I don't think you can look at this life of the most wonderful man who has ever walked this earth. The life of the human being who has impacted human history far and away more than any other human being who has ever walked this earth. I don't think you can look at his life and his teachings and his works and say that he was either a madman or a lying devil.

Now let me answer an objection when it comes down to this. Some people will like to creatively edit the Bible. When they come to a very exclusive or a radical statement of Jesus's, like in John chapter 14, verse 6, where he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. They like to do a little selective editing. And they'll say, I don't think Jesus really said that.

That Jesus, I know, wouldn't say something like that because it sounds too harsh. So I believe that Jesus was an honest man. I believe he was a true prophet.

But I don't actually believe he said that particular thing in John chapter 14, verse 6. I believe that Christians added those things in later all by themselves. Let me say, you may believe that, but there is absolutely no objective reason for a person to make a distinction between Jesus really said this or Jesus really didn't say that. You know, we don't have any ancient text which supposedly show us the true statements of Jesus before all those Christians got in and added all those things to it.

No, there's no such thing. And any such distinction that you make like that is based on purely subjective reasons. In other words, it goes like this.

I personally don't think Jesus would have said that. Therefore, he did not say it. Later, Christians just put those words in his mouth.

Well, friends, you see how that can't stand, right? Then it's just all pick and choose. Then the person who's committing adultery comes to the passage where Jesus talks about adultery and they say, you know what? I don't think Jesus said that. And then the person who makes money and success their God and

neglects God and their family, they take a look at the passages where Jesus talks about the folly of living your life for money and they say, I don't think he said that.

We can't do that, can we, ladies and gentlemen? We have to take the text as it's given to us. If it's all up to our personal opinion, if we can determine what Jesus said or didn't say all upon our own whims, then we can just throw out the whole Gospels period. It really is an all or nothing deal, I should say.

Either we take the words of Jesus as they're recorded by these historically reliable and accurate documents or we throw them out altogether. Now, let me address another issue when it comes to this. There are many people who believe that we can come to God any way that we please as long as we are sincere.

Now, friends, I admire sincerity in religion. And when somebody comes and knocks on my door on a Saturday morning and I have a discussion with them about the truth of the Bible and about the way of salvation, there's one thing I know about that person is that they're sincere. Now, not all of them are sincere, but many of them are.

And when I see sincerity in a person like that, I, just like you, I admire it. And we all despise religious hypocrisy. We all despise it when a person holds religious beliefs but is not sincere about them.

I believe sincerity goes a long way. But it doesn't go far enough to take you to God. I think in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, where Jesus described a Pharisee and a tax collector who both came to God.

And friends, might I say that they both came sincerely. The Pharisee came sincerely loving himself. And the tax collector came sincerely repentant before God.

And God said, I'll accept one and I won't accept the other. Or I think in Luke, chapter 18, where a rich young ruler came to Jesus. And that rich young ruler came to Jesus sincerely.

But he wouldn't leave and sell everything that he had and give it to the poor and follow Jesus. He was sincere, but it wasn't enough. Or I think back to Numbers, chapter 10, where we have the Old Testament story of Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron.

They came to God and offered their own offering, their own strange fire before the Lord. And friends, I'm sure they were sincere enough about it. It's just that God didn't accept it.

Because it wasn't God's fire. It was a strange fire. No, friends, we cannot come to God any way that we please.

And sincerity is not enough. At least, I should say, it's not enough to please the God of the Bible. Now, if you want to make up a God of your own imagination, and you can call Him my God.

Don't call Him God. Call Him my God, because that's what He is. He's your God.

He's not the God that actually sits in the heavens, as the Bible describes. It's not the God who created everything, as the Bible describes. It's just the God of your personal creation.

Well then, you can say your God believes or does or says whatever you want Him to. But He's not the true God. The God of the Bible is different.

And the God of the Bible says very plainly that there's one name under heaven by which all men must be saved, and that's the name of Jesus Christ. Proverbs chapter 14, verse 12 is very instructive on this point. It says, Friends, do you understand that? There's a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Now, if I could take it one step further, before we sort of go on to another point. I want to make an even more bold statement, if it's possible. If I haven't offended everybody in the room so far, let me take it another step further.

It's not even enough to believe in Jesus. Now, shockingly, that isn't narrow enough. The Bible tells us that it's not enough just to believe in Jesus, but that you have to believe in His atoning work on the cross on your behalf.

You see, the Bible tells us that that was the only way that our salvation could be accomplished. In Matthew chapter 26, when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He asked His Father, Father, if it's possible, if there's any other way, let this cup pass from me. And Jesus, in that, asked God the Father, that if there was any other way to accomplish the salvation of man, other than His atoning work on the cross, other than Him drinking the cup of representing the wrath of God poured out upon Him in our place, Jesus said, then let it be that way.

But friends, it was not so. It's not enough just to believe that Jesus lived, that Jesus taught, that Jesus existed. The Bible tells us that the demons believe that, and they tremble because of it.

It's not enough to even believe in Jesus in the sense of believing in His mere existence. You have to believe that His atoning work on the cross is your path of salvation. Friends, how do we deal with this? How do we represent this very strong belief in a world that disbelieves it so passionately? I think we find a marvelous example of this in the book of Acts chapter 17.

And that's where I'd like you to turn this evening. Turn to Acts chapter 17. In Acts chapter 17, we see Paul preaching a sermon to the people of Athens.

And I think it gives us a really wonderful pattern on how Christians should deal with the variety of beliefs in today's world. And we should understand sort of a historical perspective on how we got here today. For many hundreds of years, Christianity was the overwhelmingly dominant religion of the Western world.

I mean, there was just no other game in town. Christianity was the religion of the Western world. As a matter of fact, there's an old word that some people used to describe the Western world.

They called it Christendom. Now what's interesting is it doesn't really apply to the Western world today. There are many third world countries and many places outside of the Western world that are more passionately Christian than Europe or North America.

But friend, you need to understand that for many hundreds of years, Christianity was the overwhelmingly dominant religion of the Western world. Now today it isn't the case. Today there is real and legitimate competition from other religions.

And even from non-religion or secularism. And many people feel that Christianity just has to get with it. Come on now, you've lost your market share.

You can't go around thinking that Christianity dominates the market like it used to. You have to realize that now Christianity is just one faith among many in the world. And it does not corner the market on truth.

Wake up, Christians, and smell that coffee. What these people fail to understand is that Christianity was born in a booming religious marketplace with many competing religions. The world represented to us in the Book of Acts is not a world where Christianity rules the scene politically.

Or excuse me, not politically of course, I mean religiously. And so we should ask ourselves the question, how did the earliest Christians deal with this? Did the earliest Christians regard Christianity as just one faith among many different faiths in the world? Just one way to God among many different ways. As having no unique claim to the truth.

Well, Paul's work with the earliest Christians and the religious people of the city of Athens shows us how the earliest Christians regarded other religions. So let's take a look at verse 16 in Acts chapter 17. We read there, Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

Therefore he reasoned in the synagogues with the Jews and with the Gentile worshippers and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. And what do you notice? Paul comes to the city of Athens and he's all by himself. Usually Paul traveled in the company of associates who helped him in his missionary endeavors.

But he has gone on ahead to Athens and he's waiting for the rest of the group to catch up to him. But he's not idle in this time that he's alone. Paul looks around the city and he sees all these idols, all these statues, if you want to say, all these places of worship all over the city of Athens.

And it grieves him. He says they worship so many different gods, so many different religions in Athens. Now, in the thinking of many people, Paul should have said, Paul, isn't that great? There's many roads to God.

And look at how many of the roads the people of Athens are traveling. Well, you've got the road to Zeus and you've got the road through Apollos and you've got the road through the Egyptian gods. And then you have the road through the synagogue, the God of the Jewish people.

Isn't that wonderful? Paul said, it's not wonderful. He said, I have to persuade these people of something different. I have to persuade them that Jesus Christ is the way.

And so we read here in verses 16 and 17 that he says, verse 17, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshippers and in the marketplace daily with those who happen to be there. Paul would not just stand back and accept it that people believe differently. Now, please, Paul was not out to pass a law against anybody else's religion.

That did not interest him in the slightest. But you know what he did want to use? Personal persuasion. He would go up to people on an individual level, person to person, and say, I want to persuade you that the God that I worship is the true God.

And I want you to worship my God with me. And that's how Paul did it. But I want you to notice, he did not just accept the fact that, well, there's many gods and many different ways to God.

Let's look as it goes on here, verse 18. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, what does this babbling man want to say? Others said, he seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what is this new doctrine of which you speak? For you're bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean. For all the Athenians and their foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else either to tell or to hear of some new thing.

Well, the Epicureans, that was one class of philosophers in that day. And then the Stoics met Paul. And they all had their beliefs.

And they all wanted to discuss this with Paul. They said, well, Paul, you have some interesting religious ideas. Let's go here.

And you come up to the place where all the philosophers discuss things. That's known as the Areopagus. You come up to this place where all the philosophers discuss it and discuss it with us.

Now, what's interesting is they just like to hear new things. So they said, well, Paul, come and tell us. And Paul says, you got it.

I'm happy to tell you. So look at his message here in verse 22. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.

For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription. To the unknown God. Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing him I proclaim to you, God who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath, and all things.

And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. And he has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring.

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead.

I find this to be a very interesting sermon from the mouth of Paul. And remember, he's preaching this sermon to a religiously diverse audience. So how does he begin? You know, he doesn't begin with the Scriptures.

Most of the time, Paul did, but not here. You see, he wasn't dealing with Jews or Gentiles who would have been familiar with the Old Testament. So Paul begins with general references to religion.

I want you to understand something, and please take note of this. The apostle Paul did not mock or criticize the religious beliefs of others even when he knew that they were wrong. I wish I could say that I was all square on that point, but I think it's an example for every one of us to follow.

Paul did not mock or criticize the religious beliefs of others even when he knew they were wrong. I'll tell you, in his mind, Paul thought it was flat ridiculous that these guys had all these statues everywhere to different gods. And Paul had every right to say, you guys are nuts.

Sacrificing to Zeus? Zeus who? You really believe that? You don't believe this stuff, do you? And he could have gone on with it all day long, but he didn't. But fine, I see you're very religious. Matter of fact, that's exactly what he said.

He said, in all things, you are very religious. And the religious character of Athens was noticed by many ancient observers, some of whom thought that the Athenians were the most religious of all human beings. And then Paul goes on to build a common ground.

He says, I even found an altar with this inscription. He says, isn't it funny? I found an altar when I was walking through your city and it had this inscription, To the Unknown God. Paul understood that in their very extensive pantheon of gods, the Greeks also had an unknown god.

Now, if you remember from television years and years ago, they had a fellow known as the Unknown Comic. He wore a paper bag over it and said, Well, the Unknown God was not the god with a paper bag over his head. Actually, his origin came about in a very interesting way.

Athens was filled with statues to the Unknown God because 600 years before Paul, there had a terrible plague came upon the city and a man named Epimenides had an idea. You see, when the terrible plague came upon the city of Athens, of course, they sacrificed the Zeus. The plague didn't go away.

They sacrificed to Minerva and the plague didn't go away. They sacrificed to Poseidon and the plague didn't go away. And they tried everything.

They sacrificed all the gods they could think of and the plague didn't go away. Do you know what Epimenides said? He said, There must be a god we're missing. So he said, I'll tell you what we'll do.

We'll let loose a flock of sheep and they'll wander throughout the town and wherever the sheep lay down, right there we'll sacrifice them and build an altar to the Unknown God. That's why all over the city of Athens it was dotted with these different altars or these different statues to the Unknown God. Well, Paul says, You know what? Let me tell you about this Unknown God.

And Paul goes on to tell them about the true God who created all things. Do you see that Paul looked for common ground between the wrong religious beliefs of others and the truth found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? And I think this is a very useful thing to do. For example, if you're speaking with a Muslim, did you know that the Koran speaks very flattering about Jesus Christ? Say, Well, you should know that the Koran speaks about Jesus and it says that he's a prophet.

Let's look at what the prophet says in the Word of God. You can bring them to Jesus by taking a look at that. Or with many different people.

They have customs, they have aspects in their religion which really are an ancient memory or an ancient reference or an ancient imitation of some kind of worship to the true God. Paul recognized this and he said, You know, not everything you do is wrong and let me show something you do that's right and let me use it to lead you to the true God. And then Paul proclaimed to them the God who created everything.

He said, God who made the world and everything in it since he's the Lord of heaven and earth and might I say, my friends, that this is the God that we serve. Lord of heaven and earth. And he said, listen, ladies and gentlemen, this is the God that I worship.

And he says in verse 24, God who made the world and everything in it since he is Lord of heaven and earth does not dwell in temples made with hands. Now Paul did look for common ground but he was not afraid to confront error when he saw it. He said, you guys have these temples and you think that God lives in temples? I'm here to tell you that he does not.

Now I can imagine some of his Athenian audience being offended. Paul, how can you say that we're wrong on something? This is our religious opinion. Well, Paul says, it's fine that it's your religious opinion.

I'm here to tell you that it's incorrect because God does not live in temples made with hands. Paul did not let the wrong religious beliefs of others go unchallenged. And if you notice next, he says, nor is he worshipped, or in verse 25, with men's hands as though he needed anything since he gives life to all and breath to all things.

He's made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. Paul proclaimed that we're all descended from Adam through Noah and that there's one God who created us all and that we're all obligated to. Therefore, we should all seek the Lord.

Paul recognized our common brotherhood as humans but did not take it to mean that all beliefs are commonly true. Isn't that wonderful? And friends, sometimes I wonder when we speak to people who are of other faiths, I wonder if we have done a very good job communicating to them that they are common members of the brotherhood of man with us. Sometimes we treat them like they're aliens or like they're the scum of the earth.

God forgive us. You know, if somebody's listening to this tape and they're not a Christian and they have another faith and they're wondering and they're listening to this because they're curious about what a Christian might say about the idea of Jesus being the only way. And if they're listening to this tape and they're wondering, well, you know, Christians have treated me very poorly for the sake of my religion.

I want to say that if a Christian has treated you in a terrible way because you're of other faith, I'm very sorry for that. And they shouldn't have done that. I might also want to point out that perhaps your skin might be a little too thin.

Maybe they just told you what Paul told to the Athenians. For example, that God doesn't live in a temple made with hands. And maybe you were so offended, you thought that they were really putting you down when they were really just trying to tell you the truth of God as it is in the Bible.

But if somebody did come to you in a wrong manner or in a wrong way of speaking, they shouldn't have. And I'm sorry about that. I think it's also fascinating in this sermon that Paul used.

If you notice, in verse 28, he says, For in him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring. These two quotations that Paul uses are from Greek poets. They're not from Christians.

They're not even from Jews. Paul did not quote these men because they were prophets or because all their teaching was of God. He quoted them because their specific words communicated a biblical truth.

And by using them, he could build a bridge to his pagan audience. When he could, Paul showed how the prophets even of false religions pointed in some way to the truth of God. So wherever Paul could find a point to the actual true biblical truth he used in it.

Here's the point. Here's the biblical truth. Let's take a look at it.

Now let's follow up on it from the scriptures itself. And so Paul goes on, and in the message, he rebukes their idol worshipping. He confronts them with it all over again.

And he called them to repent of their wrong ideas about God. And if you notice how he finished up the sermon, it was very, very pointed. He said in verse 30, Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained.

He left them with the idea that Jesus was a righteous judge. And then he went on and he ended his message by talking about the resurrection. If you notice here, he is given of this all by raising him from the dead.

I love the fact that Paul seemed unable to preach a sermon without bringing in the resurrection of Jesus. For Paul, that was the central fact of Christianity. None of the Christian life made any sense without the triumph of Jesus' resurrection.

If I could make this point, it's that Paul knew that it all came back to Jesus. So what was the reaction? What was the reaction of people when they listened to this sermon? We'll take a look at verse 32. It says, And when they had heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, We will hear you again on this matter.

So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed. Among them Dionysus, the Areopagite, and a woman named Demarius, and others with them.

See, the resurrection was not a popular concept among Greek philosophers. So when Paul mentioned that, many people stopped listening to him. And Paul left.

He could have, if he wanted to, stayed there and discussed Greek philosophy all day long, but Paul wasn't interested in discussing Greek philosophy. If they didn't want to hear more about Jesus, then Paul was pretty much finished. I don't have any doubt that Paul was just beginning his sermon.

He wanted to talk a lot more about the person and the works of Jesus, but really his listeners cut him short. And some of them did believe. But friends, do you understand how Paul dealt with people who believed differently than him? He respected their beliefs, yet he didn't let them go unchallenged.

Let me just fire off these points again of what Paul did in recognizing this. First of all, Paul did not mock or criticize the religious beliefs of others, even when he knew they were wrong. Paul looked for common

ground between the wrong religious beliefs of others and the truth found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul did not let the wrong religious beliefs of others go unchallenged. Paul recognized our common brotherhood as humans, but did not take it to mean that all beliefs are commonly true. When he could, Paul showed how the prophets, even of false religions, pointed in some way to the truth of God.

Paul called on all men to repent of their wrong ideas about God, and then finally, Paul knew that it all came back to Jesus. So friends, let me kind of conclude with some closing thoughts here. I may not have convinced any of you, not any of you listening to me live in this room tonight, or any of you who are listening to this on cassette tape.

You may still believe that all religious ideas and all religious beliefs are equally valid, and that the only thing that matters is that we're equally sincere in our beliefs. Let me just point out to you, and I want to say this with all kindness, that that is a belief that is so absurd that people would only apply it to religion. If you thought that you were a cow, sincerely of course, and insisted that you should be allowed to stay outside and eat the lawn and just spend your time outside, friends, men in white coats would take you away.

They wouldn't just stand back and allow you to be sincere in your beliefs. Why? Because they objectively know that you're wrong. You might believe you're a cow, you may believe it with all of your heart and with all of your mind, but they objectively know you're wrong.

Now, why do we apply the same misguided thinking to religion and think that as long as a person believes it, it must be true? Let me address another issue. People sometimes accuse Christianity of being bigoted because it claims to be the exclusive way to God. Well, certainly there are some who claim to be Christians who are in fact bigots.

And friends, that's an embarrassment. They do not manifest the true spirit of Christianity at all. And if you are a Christian bigot, you need to repent and change your way.

But friends, Biblical Christianity, Biblical Christianity is the most pluralistic, tolerant, embracing of other cultures' religion on this earth. Do you understand that Christianity is totally pluralistic? It is the one religion to embrace other cultures and it has the most urgency to translate the Scriptures into other languages. Christianity says, listen, you come from India, you don't have to become an American to become a Christian.

No! No, you can be an Indian and be a wonderful Christian. Or here you are, you're from another country, you're from China. You don't have to become American to become a Christian.

You don't even have to become European. You can be Chinese and be a wonderful, totally committed Christian. It has nothing to do with nationality.

It has nothing to do with race. It has nothing to do with economic status. A Christian can keep their native language and culture and follow Jesus in the very midst of it.

Did you know that one of the early criticisms of Christianity was the observation that they would take anybody. That's what the world said. They said, there's something wrong with this religion.

They'll take anybody. Slave or free, rich or poor, man or woman, Greek or barbarian, all were accepted. But they were all accepted on the common ground of the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ.

To leave that common ground is spiritual suicide. Both now and in eternity. And finally, let me say one more thing in conclusion.

We need to realize that this is not about winning an argument. We're about having the best religion. Remember when you were in high school and they had the battle of the bands somewhere.

They'd get together and the bands would play and everybody would vote on what the best one was. Friends, we don't approach Christianity in a battle of the bands kind of way. You know, our religion's best and we want to beat out all the other religions.

Yay, we're number one, we're the best. No, no, no. Friends, the bottom line is that what it's about is that there's a real God in heaven and He really loves you and He really sent His Son to die on a cross so that you could be reconciled to Him.

That's how much He loves you. Friends, you could take all the founders, all the leaders, all the spiritual centers of the world religions and only one of them died in your place to save you. Only one.

That makes Christianity totally unique. There have been great men, great spiritual men. There are great spiritual men who walk the landscape of the earth today.

Friends, none of them died, much less on a cross, trading their life for yours. This isn't about winning an argument. It's about receiving and living in the love of God as it's expressed in its most perfect form in what Jesus Christ did on the cross for you and I. So, friends, why don't you take it seriously that Jesus said He was the only way and He's an honest man and He is the only way and there is such an ocean of God's love for you to live and experience if you'll come to God through the Son and let Him fill your life.

Father, that's our prayer here this evening. We pray that for everybody who listens to this message that You will help them, Lord, to come to You through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and that they'll receive from You, Lord, the glory of His resurrection life because we believe, Lord, that the foundation of our faith is that a real man was really God and that He lived and He died on the cross in our place and He rose from the dead for our right standing before You. Lord, I pray that You would help many people who hear this to trust in that and that they would, in a quiet moment, make a prayer unto You.

A prayer that says, God, I know that I'm a sinner and I know that I need Jesus Christ to be my substitute for the payment that I need to make to You. I can't lay down my life for my sin, Lord, but Jesus did. And so I accept what He did on the cross for me and now, Lord, I want to give my life unto You and live it unto Your glory every day of my life.

Lord God, pour out Your Spirit upon everyone who hears this message and help them to understand in the most loving way that Jesus Christ is indeed the way to God. The only way. And it's in Jesus' precious name that we pray.

Amen.

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