

538 Why Is There So Much Religious Confusion

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

The recently published *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, published just this year, contains articles on 2,300 religions. Religion in America is in total chaos these days. There are so many religions to choose from, one might wonder why he should choose Christianity. There are so many different kinds of Christianity and churches, one might wonder why he should choose one church over another. Religious division creates cynicism, arguments, broken families, friendships, and communities. So, we ask, "Why Should I Be a Christian?"

In many ways America today is not so unlike the ancient city of Athens. In the first century Athens was full of temples with images of pagan deities. The Greek writer Pausanius said that the Athenians worshiped the gods more than any other people and had more religion than any other city. A recent study by the City University of New York found that America is the most religiously diverse nation on earth. Right now there are more than 635 major denominations of Christianity. It's no wonder that the fastest growing religious group in America is the one that replies, "no religion."

The number of people who don't go to church anywhere has nearly doubled from 39 million in 1991 to 75 million people today. I can't help but think that the diversity of our times has done nothing but brought division and confusion. In Acts 17:16, the Bible says, "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols." It should provoke the heart of any faithful Christian to see so much religious division and chaos today. So many voices saying so many things must leave us all with a headache trying to figure out the truth.

What Paul did in a religiously divided world was simply to preach the gospel. Acts 17:17-18 says, "So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, 'What does this babbling wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection." Epicurus (342-270 B.C.) held that pleasure was the chief goal of life, and wanted a life free from pain, passions, superstitions, fears, and anxiety about death. He believed in the gods but thought they did not care. Zeno (340-265 B.C.) founded the Stoics and emphasized man's reason and living self-sufficiently. For him, God was everywhere; it was the "World-soul." Some of them disputed with Paul and called him a "babbling." Babblers to them was a ne'er do well that put forth other people's ideas as their own and without understanding what they were saying. It was not Paul who was a babbling, but the people of the time who spent all their time talking and listening, hoping to hear something new.

Paul was invited to speak at Mars Hill. Acts 17:22-25 says: So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." Many people today think they know God.

But the God *they think they know* and the God of the Bible are often two different things. One of the reasons there is so much confusion is that people believe their perceptions of God rather than what the Bible reveals about God. Their perceived God is often quite

different from the God who created them. Many people want a God of their liking rather than the God that is. Popular religion would have you believe that God so loves everyone and is so full of grace that He accepts us just as we are, even if we never repent of our sins. But the God of the Bible expects people to repent.

One popular preacher says that sin is an outdated word and shouldn't be used. He believes that using the words "sin" or "sinner" is an offensive thing that keeps people from coming to Jesus. The Bible presents a different view, however. The Bible says Jesus "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), and he "died for our sins, according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Sin is not merely breaking a law; it is breaking God's law! Sin breaks God's law and God's heart. The gospel says that Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree or cross (1 Pet. 2:24). With God, the idea of sin is very personal.

Paul said at Athens in Acts 17:30-31, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." According to Paul, God demands repentance and will judge people in righteousness at the end. You can be sure of it, because God raised Jesus from the dead! You can also know that any religion which doesn't ask you to repent is not the faith of the Bible.

In the paganism of old, everyone had their own god. They chose the god they liked. Now the idols of Greece could not talk, had no Bible, and asked nothing of their followers. Idolatry was often associated with sexual immorality, and paganism allowed people to live in sin. How convenient to serve a god that expects little out of me. As long as you didn't mess with their god, they didn't mess with yours. Everyone could believe as he liked and would leave each other alone. That is similar to America today. Good Americanism means live and let live. We are, after all a democracy.

This is why Paul was thought to be a trouble-maker to the Athenians; and frankly, Biblical Christianity is thought to be trouble today. It doesn't live and let live. Jesus asks for people to believe that He is the Messiah, the only way to heaven. Jesus demands that people repent and live righteous lives according to His teaching. Jesus asks each of us to take up our crosses and follow Him. Some will mock this, just as they did Paul when he preached. They would rather have a Christianity that costs nothing and asks nothing. That's why much of popular religion is in such a mess!

When Paul spoke of the resurrection, some mocked and some said, "we'll hear you again about this" (Acts 17:32). Some of those men joined Paul and believed on the Lord. Much of the differences in people come from their attitude. Some people are willing to listen, while others mock and make fun of Christianity. Some people place their own knowledge above the Bible and sit in judgment of it. They do not realize that one day they will be judged by the word of Christ (John 12:48). Will you tell God, or will God tell you what is right and wrong?

I sometimes hear people say, "Put twelve people in a room and read to them a passage of Scripture and you'll have twelve interpretations of that passage." Is that really true? Is it the Bible itself that causes confusion, or is it that our society tends to place the individual above the Bible? The Bible was written to be understood and understood alike. Like a textbook in school, the Bible was written for groups of people to learn and use. Why would God give us a Bible that we could not understand and then tell us He will judge on the basis of that book? God is in the business of saving not confusing.

When Luke wrote his account of the gospel, he told Theophilus, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Luke believed the Roman official Theophilus could know for certain about Jesus.

If Theophilus can know with certainty, so can we. Paul said to the Ephesians (3:4-6), "When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." In the New Testament a mystery was not an unsolvable riddle but something hidden in one generation and revealed in another.

Jesus made some promises to us that can help us through this confusion. He said in John 8:31-32, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The way to know the truth is to study the Bible, to stay in the Word, and not abandon it for human opinions or traditions. Only the Word of God can set us free from the sin, the darkness, and the confusion of our day. The Bible will bring light to a confused and decaying society. We need the Bible now more than ever! We ought to be grateful that the Lord loves us enough to tell us the truth!

Jesus also promised the apostles something we need to know. He said in John 16:12-13, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." We not only can know the truth, we can know the whole truth that leads to life and godliness in the revealed Word of God. We are not lacking anything God intended for us to know. The Bible is all-sufficient and can equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Don't settle for opinions and assumptions. Always go to the Bible.

Why is there so much confusion. People stopped listening to God and His revealed Word and started telling others what they thought. They pointed to their traditions and opinions and creeds. When you get away from the Bible, you can count on confusion. When you have confusion, people live lives without God and the morality that comes with faith in God. When people are morally and doctrinally confused, they lose sight of what really matters and make their own reality. Pagan Athens was like that, and I fear much of America is going in the same direction. More than ever we need the Bible!

That's why you need to be a Christian, why you need the Word of God as a constant companion in your life, your decisions, and your future. Become a Christian today by believing in the Lord Jesus with all your heart, repenting of your sins, and by being baptized into Christ by an immersion in water for the forgiveness of your sins. If you are a Christian who has strayed from God, quit the church, and forgotten the truth, why not return to God and leave the confusion. Today is the best day to do that.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:33, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace." It was never God's intent that this world be thrown into chaos by having hundreds of religions. Now, the devil is always at work, telling lies, making counterfeits, and encouraging new religions. The devil will do anything to get people away from the Truth. He desires to discredit God, to discredit the Lord Jesus, to discredit the Bible, to deny miracles, and to suggest man evolved rather than was created. He wants men to have their own gods rather than to submit to the one true and living God.

Peter said in 1 Peter 3:15, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the only Lord, and we must make Him Lord in our hearts. The way out of chaos is to realize the uniqueness of Jesus—unique in His birth, unique in prophecy, unique in His miracles, and unique in being raised from the dead. Only His blood can cleanse. Is it not time that we bowed our knee and confessed Him with our tongues?

America was once a great, moral country because its roots were in Christianity. The further we get away from those roots the more chaos we will see in our country. We need a great revival in this country of Bible study and prayer. We won't overcome our moral decay until we restore a spiritual foundation of love and respect for God and His Word. Today we need the Lord more than ever before. We need to study God's word so that we won't be fooled by counterfeit religions and doctrines of demons. Let's turn to the one source we can always trust!

We're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven. All the expenses are paid by your friends at Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tennessee. If you are in our area, we'd love to meet you. Worship with us some Sunday at 9 am or 6 pm. You are always welcome and wanted. If you cannot visit us, there is a wonderful congregation of the churches of Christ near you. We'd love to hear from you. Until next week, we remind you to look to God for all your answers. God bless you and we love you from Concord Road.

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