

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?” ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. 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; ²³ 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: 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. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ 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; ²⁸ 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.’ ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ 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.”

Text: Acts 17:16-31 A 8-30-26 1 Peter 3:13-22 John 14:1-14 Psalm 145 Psalmody: p. 37 (WS)
Hymns: 30, 772, 507, 283

TELL OTHERS WHAT JESUS DID FOR THEM

Dear fellow believers in Christ, and fellow witnesses of Christ,

Someone, maybe a family member, maybe someone we’ve known for a long time who has never talked about it with us before, maybe a complete stranger, will suddenly tell us, “I’m afraid of death,” or, “I’m not sure about God,” or, “I don’t know if there’s a heaven and a hell, but if there is I hope I’m going to heaven.” When people say such things to us, how can we respond?

The Apostle Paul was in Athens, Greece, where “*the city was given over to idols.*” There was a lot of interest in religion. But Paul’s “*spirit was provoked within him*” when he saw that none of these religions was the Christian religion. All these people who practiced all these religions didn’t know the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ, as their Savior; so they were all going to hell.

Can you picture yourself witnessing to people like Paul? We might shy away from witnessing to people because we’re not sure what to say, or we think we might not say the right thing, or we worry what people might think about us and how they might react. It helps to witness when instead of focusing on ourselves, we focus on the other person. This person doesn’t believe in Jesus. He doesn’t understand what it is to know that Jesus has forgiven all of his sins. He doesn’t have the peace and joy and strength that only Christ can give. He doesn’t know he’s going to hell. “The souls of men are dying, and the Master calls for you.”

We're told, *"Therefore [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there."* We can use reason when witnessing to others, to draw comparisons for them, to help them go from the known to the unknown, to show some of the logical flaws in their beliefs, and so forth. But we can't use reason alone to try to convince someone to believe in Jesus. The 'reasoning' Paul did and we want to do in our witnessing is drawing inferences directly from the Bible. For example, John 3:16 says that *"God so loved the world."* We can 'reason' with others that since God loves the whole world, He loves them, too. The Bible says that *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* (Ro. 10:17). The only kind of witnessing that can bring someone to faith is not trying to appeal to his reason, but sharing with him what God says in the Bible.

Paul told the people, *"[God] [raised] [Jesus] from the dead."* Earlier we're told that Paul *"was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."* Paul told the Corinthians, *"I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ... And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God"* (1 Cor. 2:2, 4-5). Paul didn't try to cleverly talk people into believing in Jesus. He simply told them about Jesus, and what Jesus had done for them. He told them that we are sinners, and that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Paul knew that the message of Christ and His cross, and that message alone, has the power to save people.

The people Paul began witnessing to said to him, *"May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean."* Talk about the perfect opportunity to witness to someone! They asked Paul to tell them more about Jesus. When someone brings up a religious subject or asks us what we believe, he's giving us an invitation to witness to him. As we heard earlier in our first Scripture lesson, *"always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you"* – 1 Peter 3:15.

Paul told the people, *"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."* Paul was careful not to unnecessarily offend them by the way he spoke to them. He didn't point out all their idols to tell them they were stupid or wrong, which would have immediately ended his opportunity to witness to them. Paul used tact and wisdom by noting that they were obviously interested in religion. Along with their altars to all their idols, they had put up an altar *"to the unknown god"* just in case they missed one. Paul used that as a starting point to tell them who God really is.

When someone in one way or another gives you an 'invitation' to witness to him, say a little prayer for God to help you and him. Ask him what he thinks and believes, and let him see that you care about him and what he has to say. He'll be more receptive to what you are saying. And you'll get a clearer idea of what he really believes and what Scripture passages might best help him. Pray for love and tact, so that the way you talk to him doesn't turn him off to the Word of God you're trying to bring him. Ephesians 4:15 says that we are to be *"speaking the truth in love."* Peter says that our witnessing to others should be *"with meekness"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Paul *"preached to [the people] Jesus and the resurrection."* Pray and work toward getting to what the person you're witnessing to needs to hear: what the Bible says about Jesus and what He did to save us.

Paul says, “*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 worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.*” Like Paul, we already know that anyone who believes in a religion other than Christianity believes in some form of work righteousness, thinking he has to do something to be right with his god, or somehow elevate himself to a higher spiritual plane. Use that knowledge in your witnessing. Paul pointed out to the people that we didn’t make the living God, He made us. The living God doesn’t need anything from us (some sacrifice or payment for our sins); He gives us life and everything we have (including salvation!). We don’t ‘get right’ with God and get to heaven by what we do for Him. God declares us to be righteous in His sight and takes us to heaven by what He has done for us!

Paul says that God made all people “*so that [we] should seek the Lord, in the hope that [we] might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.*” How sad that there are so many people in the world who have heard little or nothing about Jesus. And yet God says in the first chapter of Romans that He puts into everyone the knowledge that there is a God who created them and all things (Ro. 1:18ff.). Paul speaks of people “*groping*” for God. The picture from the original is “*groping*” for God like a blind person searching for something or someone. Paul says that God “*is not far*” (in the original emphasizing “*not far*”) “*from each one of us.*” God promises that whenever anyone seeks Him, He will make sure that person hears about Him and the salvation He gives us in Jesus.

Paul says, “*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.*” Paul had referred to their altar to “*THE UNKNOWN GOD,*” and to “*the One whom you worship without knowing.*” Now Paul speaks of their “*ignorance.*” Their “*ignorance*” and “*THE UNKNOWN GOD*” they worshipped – both expressions contain the same word in the original, meaning “*lack of knowledge.*” They hadn’t heard about the living God. They didn’t know the living God. They didn’t know that they should be worshiping the living God alone. In His grace, God had not destroyed them for not knowing about Him and not believing in Him. Now Paul was telling them about the living God. Paul adds, “*[God] commands all men everywhere to repent*” (my emphasis). We’re all sinners who need to repent of our sins. God wants everyone to believe in Him and be saved.

Paul says, “*[God] 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.*” Paul warned them, “*[God] has set a day when He will judge the world.*” The Judgment Day has been “*appointed*” by God. The Judgment Day is coming! Jesus rose from the dead. He is the living, almighty God who is coming to judge us all on Judgment Day (Mt. 25:31ff.). A person may not want to hear that the Judgment Day is coming, but he needs to hear it. Why had Paul been so grieved about all the idols in Athens? Why are we so grieved about all the people in the world who don’t believe in Jesus? Because the Judgment Day is coming. We don’t want anyone to go to hell. We want everyone to go to heaven (2 Pet. 3:9).

When someone in one way or another gives you an opportunity to witness to him, tell him about Jesus: who Jesus is and how Jesus feels about him and what Jesus did for him. Tell him about sin and grace. Tell him that we’re all sinners, and that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. This is what he needs to hear. This is the only way anyone can believe in the living God and be saved. “*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*” – Romans 1:16. **TELL OTHERS WHAT JESUS DID FOR THEM.** Amen.