

Reach Them With Evidence

Many Christian leaders today are softening the core truths of our faith in an effort to make Christianity more palatable to unbelievers. Research has shown, however, that most unchurched people choose a church based on its doctrine. I Peter 3:15 instructs us, *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”*

Five Lessons About Sharing Our Faith in Acts 17:

1. **The _____(Setting): _____(Where) Are We to Share?**
 - a. *“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So 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.” Acts 17:16-17.* Athens was a historic city, the capital of Greece and the home of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
 - b. Paul dialoged with the Greeks, asking lots of questions and seeking to understand their worldview. He interacted with them in the synagogue, at the marketplace, and with the intellectual elites.

2. **The _____(Approach): How Do We _____(Start)?**
 - a. *“Paul...said, ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For 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.’” Acts 17:22-23.*
 - b. Paul took the time to listen to the Athenians carefully which enabled him to address their unique needs. He began by praising them for being religious and then sought to find common ground with them. We would be wise to follow Paul’s example as we interact with our friends and family members.

3. **The _____(Message): What Do We _____(Say)?**
 - a. *“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. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:24-25.*
 - b. Paul never mentions the Bible or Jesus by name. He focuses entirely on the character of God – that he is all-powerful, everywhere-present, self-sufficient, and all-knowing. We are created by God and accountable to him.

4. **The _____(Challenge): What Do We _____(Leave Them With)?**

- a. *“Therefore since we are god’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone...In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world.” Acts 17:29-31. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10.*
- b. Before people understand that God loves them, they need to understand that God created them and holds them accountable. Such respect is often missing today, despite the fact that it is a central theme in Scripture (see Proverbs 1-9).

5. The _____(Response): What _____(Results) Should We Expect?

- a. *“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’...A few men became followers of Paul and believed.” Acts 17:32-34.* While some rejected Paul’s message, others had a ‘wait and see’ attitude. A few accepted his message, just as Jesus had taught in Matthew 7:13-14.

Even if our presentation is impeccable and our logic is sound, many unbelievers will still reject the Gospel. Atheist Richard Dawkins concedes that the universe appears to be designed, yet argues that it isn’t. Atheist Aldous Huxley admitted that he believed in evolution, not because of the evidence, but because it freed him “to pursue my own erotic passions.”

Huxley, C.S. Lewis, and John F. Kennedy all died the same day, leading Peter Kreeft to pen the book *Between Heaven and Hell: A Dialog Somewhere Beyond Death with John F. Kennedy, C.S. Lewis, and Aldous Huxley*. The stakes are high. People need Jesus. Will you be faithful in sharing your faith?

Discussion Questions

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1. Have you observed or experienced how Christian leaders are sometimes softening the core truths of Christianity? Why is it important to understand that we all have sinned, not simply that we have made mistakes? Why is the message of the cross foundational to our faith? Do you think most people choose a church based on its beliefs? What are other reasons people choose a church? What is taught in I Peter 3:15? Why is it important that all of us be prepared to share reasons why we believe?
2. Read Acts 17:16-34. Where did Paul share his faith, according to verses 16-21? Why was Athens a particularly challenging place to share the Gospel? What is the Socratic method? Why did Paul use this method in sharing his faith? Have you ever shared your faith at a shopping mall or at the grocery store or at a restaurant? How did this occur? What are some other unusual places where you have had deep spiritual conversations? Why are the intellectuals an especially difficult group to reach with the Gospel? Why is it important that we dialog with intellectuals? Do you feel called to this sort of ministry? Do you know others who are particularly good at this?
3. Look at verses 22-23. How did Paul begin his talk with the Athenians? Why was it important that he carefully listened to them at first? How did he seek to find something to praise them for? Why is this important as we share? How did Paul establish common ground with his audience? How have you done this? Look at verses 24-28. Why do you think Paul concentrated on the doctrine of God rather than quote Scripture or talk about Jesus? What are the four statements that constitute the heart of the Gospel? Why is it important to begin first with God and who He is? What did Paul describe God to the Athenians?
4. Look at verses 29-31. What challenge did Paul leave with the Athenians? What is taught in Psalm 110:10 and Proverbs 9:10? Why is it important to start first with respect for God? How do we see a lack of respect for God in our culture today? Look at verses 32-34. How did the Athenians respond to Paul's message? How do people respond today to the Gospel? Read Matthew 7:13-14. Why do most people reject the Gospel?
5. What did atheists Richard Dawkins and Aldous Huxley say that demonstrates that their rejection of Christianity is based more on stubbornness than it is on evidence? Have you experienced this with your friends and family members who reject the Gospel? Why is important that we still share with them, with gentleness and respect? Will you do that?