

NG Study Guide: “Ac. 17:16-34 “How You Can Explain God?” Apologetics Series Pt. 5 [8.12.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: It was reported in “Christianity Today” [July, 2018] that 50% of Christians will have 10 or more spiritual conversations per year. How can you explain God? Is God capable of being known? Can someone have a personal and practical relationship with God? Is God some distant, impersonal, unconcerned cosmic genie, policeman or grandpa? Today we’ll discover how you can explain God, so that you and those you engage can know God and make Him known.

1. Look for opportunities to speak about God [16-22]

Paul was at Athens [16] waiting for Silas and Timothy to join Him. Athens was the intellectual and cultural apex of the ancient world. During Athens’ golden age from 500 B.C. to 200 B.C. there were great philosophers like Euripedes, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato. There were math and science advances by Pythagoras, Aristarchus and Archimedes. The Parthenon was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world with a forty-foot gold and ivory statue of Athena goddess of wisdom and war. There were temples, shrines, and alters to Apollo, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Bacchus, Neptune, Diana, Olympus gods, and more than 3,000 statues – more than the rest of Greece combined. Athenians viewed themselves as superior to others but in their effort to make sense of their world they created gods like themselves: indifferent, immoral, and capricious.

Paul’s spirit was provoked [16], or he was sad and grieved as he contemplated that the Athenians did not know the True and Living God. We need our spirit to be moved to compassion for the lost, like Paul and Jesus [Mk. 6:34], rather than indifference, or anger towards the lost.

Talk with people where they are at, build relationships, and dialogue. Paul *reasoned in the synagogue* [17]. He went where those who were seeking the true and living God gathered and showed from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. He also went to the agora or marketplace [17] and spoke of Jesus and the resurrection [18]. In our culture, we want to meet people at places of worship, parks, schools, recreation, work, coffee-houses, and our neighborhoods.

Bring the message to the people. The Greek philosophers were seeking to make sense of life apart from the Bible. The *Epicureans* [18] argued that contentment is found in pursuing pleasure; and death is the end, and the gods are remote and don’t care. The *Stoics* [18] argued that contentment could be reached by self-discipline that freed you from emotional and sensual desires. The philosophers weren’t impressed by Paul’s oratory skills and called him a babbler [18] [1 Cor. 1:17-25], and presumed that Paul was talking about a god that they had not heard of as he proclaimed Jesus and His resurrection [18]. So, Paul was brought to the 30-member Athenian court of justice for moral and religious matters that met at Mars Hill or Aeropagus below the Acropolis. Some were interested to know what doctrine Paul spoke of [19,21].

Seek to understand their worldview and show respect. Paul commended them for being *very religious* [22]. He affirms that they are spiritual people, and avoids insulting them as pagan, heathen, idolaters. Paul made effort to understand their worldview and quoted their poets [28]. We should connect with people by an awareness of their culture and interests

2. Introduce people to God [23-29]: We want to help people understand that God exists and can be known. The Athenians had an *altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD* [23]. They had experienced a terrible famine, and in an effort to stop the famine they made sacrifices to all the known gods and to avoid offending an unknown God they made an altar, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

God is Creator [v.24-25] *God who made the world and everything in it ... Lord of heaven & earth* [25], He transcends man-made *temples or objects made with men’s hands* such as idols [25]. God is all sufficient, and provides for man, *God gives life, breath and all things* [25].

God is Sovereign [v.26] *God determines the boundaries of nations, their time,* He controls the prosperity, position, and place of nations and individuals. It was not the brilliance of the Athenians that gave them their place in the world, nor could they maintain it apart from God's sovereign will.

God created you to seek Him [27-28] *so that they should seek the Lord ... and find Him [27]. Yet, He is not far from us [27].* In contrast, the gods of Greeks were distant and disinterested atop Olympus. *Mankind is God's offspring [28].* No other religious text (claimed holy book) besides the Bible asserts that deity created man because of love and delight. All of humanity are God's offspring, but only those who have received Christ are called the children of God [Jn. 1:12].

3. Explain how to know God [29-34]

No idol or statue can explain God, *do not think of the Divine Nature like something shaped by man [29].* Since God is Spirit and infinite a finite mind cannot fully conceive God [Jn. 4:24, 1 Tim. 1:17]. Nevertheless, the Bible accurately reveals what mankind needs to know about God. His holy, just, loving, gracious and merciful nature is revealed by the Bible. Apart from the Bible you cannot correctly understand God, and results in the worship of false gods, or false worship of the true God. Apart from the Bible, you'll create a god in your image, who mirrors your values, and when confronted with biblical truth reply, "My God wouldn't do that."

You can know God through repentance and faith in Christ. There is no longer any excuse since the Bible reveals the unknown God. God can be known and Jesus is the bridge between God and man [30, Jn. 14:6, 1Tim. 2:5]. Repentance relates to changing your thinking about God and sin resulting in a change of action to yield to God. The resurrection is the proof of the gospel message and the gospel is the means to avoid the coming judgment that is universal, righteous and certain [31]. The responses to Paul are likely typical of the responses you'll receive: some mock [32], some will be curious and want to hear more [32], and some will believe [34].

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some of the reasons why Christians don't speak about God with unbelievers?

Q2. What difference is it likely to make if Christians listen better to understand the worldview and culture of unbelievers?

Q3. How have you tried to introduce people to God? Describe some of your experiences.

Q4. How would you like to apply this lesson to your life?

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

Digging Deeper

1. Pray and ask God to provide an opportunity this week to make Him known. As you are led by God, engage a neighbor where you live, work, study, or play in a spiritual conversation where you seek to explain God. Reflect on the experience.

2. Consider a time when you sought to make God known to an unbeliever. What happened and how did you feel?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Pray and ask God to provide an opportunity this week to make Him known. As you are led by God, engage a neighbor where you live, work, study, or play in a spiritual conversation where you seek to explain God.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.