
ACTS 17:16-34 Connecting to the Culture

Here Luke gives us a record of Paul's interaction with a pluralistic group in Athens who know nothing about Jesus. This group was much like our modern cultures today. Athens was a city full of idols, empty gods made of wood or stone or gold who should not steal praise from the one true living God. Paul preaches in the synagogue but also in the marketplace.

Some of the local philosophers debate with him and invite him to speak at the Areopagus, to a society of philosophers. Paul gives a creative talk that exemplifies how to approach such a group.

Think

Have you ever been immersed into a completely different culture with people who spoke a completely different language? Summarize how you felt. How did you communicate?

Talk

1. List some principles/observations about Paul's talk. How is this different from other talks Paul gave in Acts that were primarily addressed to the Jews?
2. How did the group respond?
3. What are some specific ways that you would explain the gospel to a person with no religious background? What would you differently if they had a background in another religion?

Act

Form a small group to travel to a nearby place where you know they do things "differently." Spend a day just telling people you are studying cultures and making a list of all the differences you see and asking "why?" – why do they do it that way? Try really hard not to use the word "wrong" – many times the differences really are not wrong but happen because those people value something (people, time, money, possessions, family, etc.) that your own culture does not value as highly.

Then ask, "What would these people value in the message of Christ?" "What would communicate with them the love of God for them?"