

February 26, 2017

## Religious Confusion 2 Timothy 3:1-7

**Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.**

The *Encyclopedia of American Religions* lists 2,300 religions. Religion in America is terribly \_\_\_\_\_ and diverse these days. So how can know you what's really \_\_\_\_\_ about God? The Bible provides the \_\_\_\_\_ out of confusion and into religious truth. This Word has stood the test of time; and the more you know about the Bible, the more you'll \_\_\_\_\_ what it has to say.

We live in the most religiously \_\_\_\_\_ culture of all time. You might wonder \_\_\_\_\_ you should choose Christianity. There are so many different kinds of Christianity, you might wonder why you should choose one \_\_\_\_\_ over another. Religious division \_\_\_\_\_ doubt, cynicism, arguments, broken families, and broken friendships. So, we ask, "How can we find our way out of all the confusion?"

Our nation is like the ancient city of \_\_\_\_\_. In the first century, Athens was full of \_\_\_\_\_ devoted to pagan deities. The Greek writer Pausanius said the Athenians worshiped the gods more than any others and had more religion than any other \_\_\_\_\_. But, we too are a religiously diverse \_\_\_\_\_. There are \_\_\_\_\_ major denominations of Christianity and countless independent groups. This division is confusing; and it's no wonder the \_\_\_\_\_ growing religious group in America is the one that replies, "no religion." The number of people who don't go to church has \_\_\_\_\_ from 39 million in 1991 to 75 million people today. This diversity has brought nothing but division and confusion. We believe there is something \_\_\_\_\_ and something \_\_\_\_\_ from God. And, it's right where it's always been.

**Our reading today comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:1-7.** That's a great \_\_\_\_\_ for us today as well as for those in the time of Timothy.

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 \_\_\_\_\_ of idols." It should provoke the \_\_\_\_\_ of any faithful Christian today to see so much religious confusion. There are so many \_\_\_\_\_ saying so many different things and that must leave us trying to figure out what is the truth. What Paul did in a religiously divided world was simply to \_\_\_\_\_ the gospel of Christ.

Acts 17:17-18 says, "So he \_\_\_\_\_ 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. Some said, 'What does this babbling wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of \_\_\_\_\_ divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

Epicurus, who lived 300 years before Christ, held that \_\_\_\_\_ 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 didn't really care, so he pursued pleasure. A contemporary, Zeno, founded the Stoics and emphasized man's \_\_\_\_\_ and self-sufficiently. For him, God was everywhere; it was

the “World-soul.” Neither the Stoics nor the Epicureans ever understood the \_\_\_\_\_ of God! Some of them \_\_\_\_\_ with Paul and called him a “babbling.” Babblers to them were a ne’er do well and they put forth other people’s ideas as their own and didn’t understand what they were \_\_\_\_\_ about. Paul was not a babbling; the babblers were the Athenians who spent all their time talking and listening, hoping to hear something \_\_\_\_\_.

So, they invited Paul to \_\_\_\_\_ at Mars Hill. **Read what Paul said in Acts 17:22-25.**

Many today think they \_\_\_\_\_ God. But, the God they think they know and the \_\_\_\_\_ God of the Bible are often quite different. People confuse themselves when they believe their perceptions of God rather than what the Bible actually \_\_\_\_\_ about God. Their perceived God is quite different from the God who \_\_\_\_\_ them. Many want a God of their own \_\_\_\_\_ who always agrees with them rather than the God of Scripture. 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 \_\_\_\_\_ of our sins. But the God of the Bible \_\_\_\_\_ people to repent.

Some say that “sin” is an \_\_\_\_\_ word that no longer people should use. They imagine using the words “sin” or “sinner” is offensive and keeps people from \_\_\_\_\_ to Jesus. The Bible, however, says that Jesus “came into the world to save \_\_\_\_\_” (1 Timothy 1:15), and he “died for our sins, according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Sin is not merely breaking a law; it is breaking \_\_\_\_\_ law! Sin breaks God’s law and God’s \_\_\_\_\_. The gospel says Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might \_\_\_\_\_ to sin and \_\_\_\_\_ to righteousness (1 Peter 2:24). With God, the idea of sin is very \_\_\_\_\_. God hates sin and He wants to transform our lives. **Read what Paul said at Athens in Acts 17:30-31.** God demands repentance and will \_\_\_\_\_ people in righteousness at the end. You can be \_\_\_\_\_ of it, because God raised Jesus from the dead! Any preacher who doesn’t \_\_\_\_\_ you to repent is not a gospel preacher.

In the paganism of old, everyone had their \_\_\_\_\_ god. They chose the god that they liked. The idols of Greece couldn’t \_\_\_\_\_; they didn’t have a Bible, and asked nothing of their followers. Idolatry was often associated with sexual immorality, and paganism allowed people to \_\_\_\_\_ in sin. That’s very convenient to serve a god that expects \_\_\_\_\_ out of you. As long as you didn’t mess with their god, they didn’t mess with yours. Everyone could believe as he \_\_\_\_\_ and would leave each other alone. That’s very similar to our culture of “live and let live.”

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

When Paul spoke of the resurrection, some mocked him but others said, “we’re going to \_\_\_\_\_ you again about this” (Acts 17:32). Some of those men \_\_\_\_\_ Paul and believed on the Lord. Much of the differences in people come from \_\_\_\_\_. Some people are willing to \_\_\_\_\_, while others mock and make fun of Christianity. Some think they know more than God knows and they

sit in judgment of the \_\_\_\_\_ itself. They don't realize that one day the Word of Christ will judge them and decide their eternal \_\_\_\_\_ (John 12:48). Will you tell God, or will God tell you what is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_?

People say, "Put twelve people in a room and \_\_\_\_\_ to them a passage of Scripture and you'll have twelve interpretations of that passage." I've heard that a lot, but is it really \_\_\_\_\_? Does the Bible itself cause the confusion, or is it that we tend to place our own \_\_\_\_\_ above the Bible? The Bible was written to be understood, but God also wants us to understand it \_\_\_\_\_. Like a textbook in school, the Bible was written for groups of people to \_\_\_\_\_ and use. Why would God give us a Bible that we could not understand and then tell us that He will judge on the basis of that book? God is in the business of \_\_\_\_\_ not confusing.

Paul said to the Ephesians, "When you read this (speaking about what he had written), 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" (Ephesians 3:4-6). In the New Testament, a mystery was not an unsolvable riddle but something \_\_\_\_\_ from one generation but \_\_\_\_\_ to another. Jesus made some \_\_\_\_\_ to us that can help us through this confusion.

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

Jesus also promised the apostles, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into \_\_\_\_\_ the truth" (John 16:12-13). We not only can know the truth, we can know the \_\_\_\_\_ truth that leads to life and godliness in the revealed Word of God. We're not \_\_\_\_\_ anything that God intended for us. The Bible is all-sufficient and can \_\_\_\_\_ us for every good work. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and \_\_\_\_\_ for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Don't settle for opinions or assumptions. Don't settle for human traditions that stand outside the Bible. Go to the Bible. If you can't find it \_\_\_\_\_ in Scripture, don't believe it or practice it.

Why is there so much religious confusion? People \_\_\_\_\_ listening to God and His revealed Word and \_\_\_\_\_ trusting their own thinking. When you get away from the Bible, you can count on confusion. When you have confusion, people end up doing what they \_\_\_\_\_. They live without God's teaching, and they \_\_\_\_\_ the morality taught in the Word of God. When people are morally and doctrinally confused, they lose sight of what matters and they make up their own \_\_\_\_\_. Pagan Athens was like that, and I fear much of our world today is going in the same direction. More than ever we need to \_\_\_\_\_ to the Bible!

The Bible contains a message ensured by God that will never \_\_\_\_\_. You can count on its

promises and its warnings. You can believe every word of it as a sure \_\_\_\_\_ of truth. First Peter 1:23-25 says, “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord \_\_\_\_\_ forever.’ And this is the word which was \_\_\_\_\_ to you.” The everlasting gospel message is your true hope, your sure anchor, and your only opportunity for eternal life.

Paul said, “God is not a God of confusion but of \_\_\_\_\_” (1 Corinthians 14:33). God never intended to throw this world into \_\_\_\_\_ by having hundreds of religions and hundreds of ways to live. God wants everybody to \_\_\_\_\_ under His teaching. On the other hand, the devil is always at \_\_\_\_\_, telling lies, making spiritual counterfeits, and encouraging new religions. The devil will do anything to \_\_\_\_\_ people away from the Truth. He makes every effort to discredit God, to discredit the Lord Jesus, to discredit the Bible, to deny miracles, and to suggest that man evolved rather than was created. He wants men to have their own gods rather than to \_\_\_\_\_ to the one true and living God.

The Bible says, “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being \_\_\_\_\_ 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” (1 Peter 3:15). Jesus is the one and only Lord, but have you made Him Lord in your \_\_\_\_\_? The way to overcome confusion is to recognize 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 \_\_\_\_\_ can cleanse your sins. Oh, let’s follow the Lord Jesus!

Many in this land once found their moral and theological \_\_\_\_\_ in the teaching of Jesus Christ found in the New Testament. The farther we drift from those values, the more confusion and chaos we’ll see. We need a great \_\_\_\_\_ of Bible study and prayer. We’ll never overcome our moral and spiritual decay until we \_\_\_\_\_ our love and respect for God and His Word. We need to \_\_\_\_\_ God’s Word so that we won’t be fooled by counterfeit religions and false doctrines. Let’s turn to the one \_\_\_\_\_ that we can always trust! We must go back to the Bible as our constant companion to \_\_\_\_\_ us know the truth and to live righteously.

Following the Bible only makes Christians. We intend to \_\_\_\_\_ the teaching of Jesus Christ in Scripture, and nothing else. If you add other doctrines from other sources, you’ll be spiritually confused and will corrupt your \_\_\_\_\_. You can become just a Christian today.

You do this by faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith, you can’t \_\_\_\_\_ God (Hebrews 11:6). You must \_\_\_\_\_ of your sins. You can’t live on in sin and still please God. You must also be \_\_\_\_\_ into Christ by an immersion in water for the forgiveness of your sins. When you’re baptized into the death of Christ, the blood of Jesus will \_\_\_\_\_ away your sins (Romans 6:3).

Perhaps you’re a member of the church of Christ who has \_\_\_\_\_ from God, turned to sin, and quit the church. My friend, will you return to God? If you fall away from God, you’ll find only confusion and chaos. You can’t thumb your nose at God without consequences. Repent of your sins and ask God’s forgiveness. Today is the best day to follow the Lord and to worship with the church of Christ. We’re here to help you know God and to love Him.