

"Religious Confusion"

The *Encyclopedia of American Religions* lists 2,300 religions. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." Religion in America is terribly confused and diverse these days. So how can we know what's really true about God? Well stay tuned, and we'll explore the truth.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We search God's Word, because we know the Bible is entirely trustworthy. The Bible provides the way 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 treasure what it has to say. We're so glad that you joined us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

We live in the most religiously diverse culture of all time. You might wonder why you should choose Christianity. There are so many different kinds of Christianity, you might wonder why you should choose one church over another. Religious division creates 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 Athens. In the first century Athens was full of temples devoted to pagan deities. The Greek writer Pausanius said that the Athenians worshiped the gods more than any others and had more religion than any other city. But we too are a religiously diverse culture. There are 635 major denominations of Christianity and countless independent groups.

This division is confusing; and it's no wonder the fastest growing religious group in America is the one that replies, "no religion." The number of people who don't go to church has grown from 39 million in 1991 to 75 million people today. This diversity has brought nothing but division and confusion. We believe there is something better and something real from God. And it's right where it's always been.

Now we offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, if you like, you can call our toll-free number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now we won't hassle you for money or add you to a list if you contact us. You can also catch our programs on our website at www.searchtv.org. You can read transcripts, listen, or see the programs there.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, and then we'll read from 2 Timothy 3 verses 1 to 7.

Our reading today comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter 3, verses 1 thru 7. "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." That's a great warning for us today as well as those in the time of Timothy. Let's pray together. Father help us always to love You and to be devoted to Your cause, to know the truth, and to love what is right. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

In Acts 17 verse 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 full of idols." Well it should provoke today the heart of any faithful Christian to see so much religious confusion. So many voices 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 preach the gospel of Christ.

Acts 17:17 to 18 says, "So he reasoned 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. And some said, 'Well what does this babbling wish to say?' And others said, 'Well he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

Now Epicurus, who lived 300 years before Christ, held that pleasure was the chief goal of life, and wanted a life free from pain, and passions, superstitions, fears, and anxiety about death. He believed in the gods but thought they don't really care, so he pursued pleasure. Now a contemporary, Zeno founded the Stoics and emphasized man's reason and living self-sufficiently. For him, God was everywhere; it was the "World-soul." Now neither the Stoics nor the Epicureans ever understood the love of God!

Some of them disputed with Paul and called him a "babbling." Well now babblers to them was a ne'er do well and put forth other people's ideas as their own and didn't understand what they were talking about. Well Paul was not a babbling; the babblers were the Athenians who spent all their time talking and listening, hoping to hear something new.

So, they invited Paul to speak at Mars Hill. Acts 17:22 to 25 says: So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." Now many today think they know God.

But the God they think they know and the true God of the Bible are often quite different. People confuse themselves when they believe their perceptions of God rather than what the Bible actually reveals about God. Their perceived God is quite different from the God who created them. Many want a God of their own liking 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 repent of our sins. But the God of the Bible expects people to repent.

Some say that "sin" is an outdated word that no longer people should use. They imagine using the words "sin" or "sinner" is offensive and keeps people from coming to Jesus. The Bible, however, says that Jesus "came into the world to save sinners" (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 God's law! Sin breaks God's law and God's heart. The gospel says Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Peter 2 verse 24). With God, the idea of sin is very personal. God hates sin and He wants to transform our lives. Paul said at Athens in Acts 17 verses 30 and 31, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." God demands repentance and will judge people in righteousness at the end. You can be sure of it, because God raised Jesus from the dead! Now any preacher who doesn't ask you to repent is not a gospel preacher.

In the paganism of old, everyone had their own god. They chose the god that they liked. Now the idols of Greece couldn't talk, they didn't have a Bible, and asked nothing of their followers. Idolatry

was often associated with sexual immorality, and paganism allowed people to live in sin. Well that's very convenient to serve a god that expects nothing out of you. Now as long as you didn't mess with their god, they didn't mess with yours. And everyone could believe as he liked and would leave each other alone. Well that's very similar to our culture. We tell everyone "live and let live."

But this is why Paul was called 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 believe that He is the Messiah, the only way to heaven. Jesus demands that people repent and live righteous lives according to His teaching. Jesus asks each of us to take up our crosses and follow Him. Now some will mock this, just as they did Paul when he preached. They would rather have a Christianity that costs nothing and asks nothing. That's why much of popular religion, popular Christianity is in such a mess!

When Paul spoke of the resurrection, some mocked him but others said, "well we're going to hear you again about this" (Acts 17 and verse 32). Some of those men joined Paul and believed on the Lord. Now much of the differences in people come from attitude. Some people are willing to listen, while others mock and make fun of Christianity. Some think they know more than God knows and they sit in judgment of the Bible itself. And they don't realize that one day the word of Christ will judge them and decide their eternal destiny (John 12 verse 48). Will you tell God, or will God tell you what is right and wrong?

People say, "Put twelve people in a room and read 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 true? Does the Bible itself cause the confusion, or is it that we tend to place our own thinking above the Bible? Now the Bible was written to be understood as we've talked about before, but God also wants us to understand it alike. Like a textbook in school, the Bible was written for groups of people to learn 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 saving not confusing.

Paul said to the Ephesians in chapter 3, verses 4 to 6, that "When you read this (that is 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." Now in the New Testament a mystery was not an unsolvable riddle but something hidden from one generation but revealed to another. Jesus made some promises to us that can help us through this confusion.

The Lord Jesus said in John 8 verses 31 and 32, "If you abide in my word (my word), you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Now the way to know the truth is to study 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 light to a confused and decaying society. And so we need the Bible now more than ever! We ought to be grateful that the Lord loves us enough to tell us the truth!

Jesus also promised the apostles in John 16 verses 12 to 13, he said "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 all the truth." We not only can know the truth, we can know the whole truth that leads to life and godliness in the revealed Word of God. We're not lacking anything that God intended for us. The Bible is all-sufficient and can equip us for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16 to 17 says, that "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable 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. And if you can't find it taught in Scripture, don't believe it or practice it.

Why is there so much religious confusion? People stopped listening to God and His revealed Word and started 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 please. They live without God's teaching, and they ignore 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 rules. Pagan Athens was like that, and I fear much of our world today is going in the same direction. Oh more than ever we need to return to the Bible!

The Bible contains a message ensured by God that will never change. You can count on its promises and its warnings. You can believe every word of it as a sure foundation of truth. 1 Peter 1:23 to 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 endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." The everlasting gospel message is your true hope, your sure anchor, and your only opportunity for eternal life.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:33, that "God is not a God of confusion but of peace." God never intended to throw this world into chaos by having hundreds of religions and hundreds of ways to live. God wants everybody to unite under His teaching. On the other hand, the devil is always at work, telling lies, making spiritual counterfeits, and encouraging new religions. The devil will do anything, anything to lead 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 submit to the one true and living God.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 3 and verse 15, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready 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." Jesus is the one and only Lord, but have you made Him Lord in your heart? 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 blood can cleanse your sins. Oh, let's follow the Lord Jesus. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful for Jesus who came to us to help us to understand the truth and to be set free. Father, help us to follow Him always. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Many in this land once found their moral and theological values 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 revival of Bible study and prayer. We'll never overcome our moral and spiritual decay until we restore our love and respect for God and His Word. We need the Lord today more than ever. We need to study God's word so that we won't be fooled by counterfeit religions and false doctrines. Let's turn to the one source that we can always trust! We must go back to the Bible as our constant companion to help us know the truth and to live righteously.

Following the Bible only makes Christians only. We intend to follow 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 faith. You can become just a Christian today.

And you do this by faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith, you can't please God (Hebrews 11 and verse 6). You must repent of your sins. You can't live on in sin and still please God. You must also be baptized

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 wash away your sins (Romans 6 and verse 3).

Perhaps you're a member of the church of Christ who has strayed 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.

We hope that you've grown spiritually by today's study of God's Word. If you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or you can send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in this area that's served by this station. Oh they love and guests, and you'll be glad that you visited. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and encourage your friends to watch this program. And as always we say to you, God bless you, and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.