

**Message Date: November 22, 2020**

**Message Title: Our Identity in Christ**

**Preached by: Christopher Coats**

**Scripture--Acts 17:1-4 & 22-31**

*Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.*

*22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 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. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for*

*"In him we live and move and have our being";*

*as even some of your own poets have said,*

*"For we are indeed his offspring.'*

*29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. 30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 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."*

## **Main Idea--**

God reveals himself through creation, then the law, and then through Jesus the Christ. Paul would walk his hearers through this timeline. They knew Scripture.

Athens was a city full of idols. After the synagogue, he spoke in the marketplace. (Acts 17:17) Those present:

- Epicureans--"Live well." Health, tranquility, luxury.
- Stoics--"Do good." Have a positive impact on the world.

Paul's challenge: How do you teach the message of Jesus to those who do not know the Bible?

The need to know who we are--our identity--is a quest for all people at all times. The Epicurean and Stoic philosophy did not answer the question. Paul says we are God's offspring.

Fewer and fewer Americans have a Biblical worldview. Most of our community is open to something new. They are drawing identity from family and friends.

## **Application--**

- How has this message changed your thinking about engaging the unbelievers in your life?
- What would "your worldview is not working" statements look like when speaking with the actual people you interact with each day?
- Scripture says: *but now he 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.* How does this statement speak to the importance and urgency of sharing our faith?

## Twelve Ideas for Conversational Prayer

Ideas to keep your prayer time fresh and meaningful.

*By Michael C. Mack*

Some people would rather have teeth pulled than to pray out loud, others look at prayer as an opportunity to gossip, and still others monopolize the time with long-winded prayers. Some groups spend more time talking about prayer needs than actually praying. And even prayer time can be dry and meaningless if it becomes just something you automatically do each week with little enthusiasm. How can your group keep your prayer time fresh and meaningful? Here are a few ideas you can try.

1. Ask for volunteers to pray specifically for each need as it is spoken. The person can pray immediately before going on to the next request, or each person can voice his or her assigned prayers after all requests have been shared.
2. Break into smaller groups of two to four for sharing and prayer.
3. Use fill-in-the-blank prayers. Have participants fill in words to short phrases such as, "God is \_\_\_\_\_." Then have each person say his or her completed phrase. Then have them fill in the blank with the same word for this phrase: "God, you are \_\_\_\_\_." Again, have each person say his or her phrase. You can do a similar exercise using psalms, but having participants put their own word(s) in particular places. For instance, use Psalm 8:1: "I love you, O Lord, my \_\_\_\_\_." Or Psalm 23: "The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_, I shall not \_\_\_\_\_."
4. As the leader, pray in short phrases. Ask others who usually pray out loud to also pray in short phrases. Then ask those who do not usually pray to simply say short phrases to the Lord. You may need to jump in with a short prayer especially after someone in the group says a long-winded prayer.
5. Use guided prayer. One at a time, the leader suggests areas for the members to pray about silently. This works particularly well when dealing with difficult subjects in prayer, such as confession.
6. Do a Bible study on prayer. Look at different ways to pray as shown in Scripture: raising hands, kneeling, laying prostrate. Do a study on the book of Acts with special emphasis on prayer. Use this time to emphasize prayer in the group, putting into practice what you are learning together.
7. Have members write out their prayer needs on index cards. Then put the cards into a bowl and have everyone pick a card (not their own). Have each person then pray for that need (either aloud or silently). Don't try this one with a new group or one in which people feel intimidated about praying aloud.
8. Paraphrase Jesus' model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Divide it into natural divisions: praise and thanksgiving, petitions, confession and seeking forgiveness, deliverance from evil, and praise. You can use the model prayer in other ways as well. For example, group members can write their own prayers based on it, or you can use it in a guided prayer session.
9. Personalize a psalm or one of the great prayers from the book of Acts or one of Paul's letters. Ephesians 3:14-21 is a good one to try.
10. Suggest that each person has a limited time to share. Or simply ask the group to keep "catching up on news" until after the meeting. Spend more time praying than sharing. Stay away from sharing prayer requests and then turning around and praying them back to God as if he wasn't listening.
11. Tell the group that in just about every country outside the US—and in some American churches—Christians often pray their own prayers aloud all at the same time. The idea is simply to lift our individual prayers to God without worrying about others listening or trying to listen to others' prayers. Try it with the group. All participants pray low, almost under their breaths. Tell them, "No one will hear your specific words, just a murmur." The sound this makes is beautifully soothing. This form of prayer helps people keep their focus on God and not let their minds wander.
12. Keep a prayer diary of your group. Include the date of the request, the person making the request, the need itself, and the date and circumstances by which the request was answered. It's fun and encouraging to look back over requests and see how they were answered.