













SAYS WHO?

TOOLBOX

-  THINK
-  OBSERVE
-  CLOSE-UP
-  WRITE
-  DISCUSS
-  FEELINGS
-  BRAINSTORM
-  REFERENCE
-  PASSAGE
-  ARTICLE
-  BIG IDEA
-  CROSSROAD

EXPLORE

Rocky slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the charge against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong but he thought he could break it. He knew, however, that his timing would have to be perfect. Rocky was aware that it was because of his early roughness that he had been penalized so severely. Much too severely from his point of view. The situation was becoming frustrating; the pressure had been grinding on him for too long. He was being ridden unmercifully. Rocky was getting angry now. He felt he was ready to make his move. He knew that his success or failure would depend on what he did in the next few seconds.

—Anderson, Reynolds, and Goetz (1977)

DISCUSS

What's happening in this story?

CRITICAL THINKING

Why might there be different interpretations of this story?

DEFINITION

RELATIVISM: The belief that there is no authoritative interpretation of the world or no authoritative worldview.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE IF SOMETHING IS RIGHT OR WRONG?

1. "Basically, if I don't like it then it's wrong. If I like it then it's right. Simple."
2. "Basically from experience—from what I see, read and feel. Just what feels right for me. There's no particular thing that makes me say this is morally right or this is morally wrong."
3. "Whether something is right or wrong, I mean, that's up to the individual. I think that it all depends on circumstances in your life. I decide whether something's wrong for me. If it's not morally correct for me then I won't do it. Something's good for me if it's going to make me happy or it's going to get me what I want."
4. "I'm always consistent with what I'm sure is right. But whether or not the man upstairs perceives that as being right—that's another story."

(R.C. Sproul, *Choosing My Religion*, Ligonier Ministries)

DOES THE GOD OF THE BIBLE EXIST?

1. "If two people came together and one person said that there is a god and one person said there isn't a god, they could both be right at the same time because it's all just opinion of what you believe and what you were brought up to believe."
2. "When it comes to everybody, like, giving different opinions of God and what He looks like and all that, everybody has their own opinion of God. When you get to know God, He's whoever you want Him to be. He could be that tree. God's a tree today."
3. "I like to respect all religions the same. Just because I was socialized into Christianity it doesn't necessarily mean that that's the only belief that's valid."
4. "I guess God exists for some people, and then for some people He doesn't."

CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND

"There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."

Professor Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p.25.

DISCUSS

On whose authority are these students basing their judgments?



BACKGROUND TO ACTS

Luke, the author of Acts and the gospel of Luke, gives as his reason for writing, "that you may know the certainty of things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-11). Through historic accounts of people and places, Luke records the early development of the Christian movement to instill confidence in his reader that Christ is God, and that He is risen and active.

In sum, this book documents the spectacular life of the early church—all of the challenges, opposition and problems that early believers faced and overcame. We see that, though the church encountered numerous obstacles, "the word of God continued to increase and spread" (12:24) throughout the first century world.



PAUL IN ATHENS

During his second missionary journey, Paul arrives in the busy, cosmopolitan city of Athens, Greece. A few centuries earlier, Athens had reigned as the political, cultural, and intellectual center of the world. Even after the Roman Empire conquered the region, Greek language and culture dominated peoples' lives. Paul talks about Christ with many types of people during his stay in Athens: Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, fellow Jews, and "God-fearing" Greeks. Finally, Paul is taken before the Areopagus—a prestigious Greek council of diverse religious and moral rulers, and like a savvy defense attorney turns the tables on the council. Thus demonstrating both the interpretive authority upon which a Christian should rely, and how a Christian can represent the biblical interpretation of the world in opposition to false beliefs.



PREPARATION ACTS 17:16-21

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling you are saying?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)



BABBLER

a man who picks up scraps of information and retails them second-hand, a plagiarist, or [someone] who make[s] a show, in unscientific style, of knowledge obtained from misunderstanding lectures.

W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1940), p. 93.



COMPARE

1. In what ways is our cultural situation like the one Paul faced?
2. How do you think Paul felt when he was called a babbler?



WHO IS PAUL?

Luke 6:12-16
 Acts 9:1-16
 Galatians 1:11-2:10
 Romans 1:1
 Galatians 1:11
 Timothy 1:1
 Ephesians 2:19-3:6



ANALYZE

Based on these verses, would you say Paul is a credible source? Why or why not?



PROSECUTION ACTS 17:22-31

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I walked around and observed your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."



OBSERVE

What are some of the biblical teachings Paul proclaims to the Athenians in this passage? Where else in the Bible are these teachings mentioned?

Teaching

Reference

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



CRITICAL THINKING

1. Based solely on what Paul says in his speech, would you say Paul believes his view is only one of many possible true views? Why?
2. How could you gain similar knowledge to help you interpret your world from a Christian perspective?



PLEAS OF THE CROWD ACTS 17:32-34

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³At that Paul left the Council. ³⁴A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.



DISCUSS

1. What are the responses of the crowd?
2. How do people respond to Christ today?

How relativism might affect you . . .



SOCIOLOGY 101

During her lecture one morning Professor Burns says, "Most cultures describe reality through religious stories. Social science shows that religious beliefs are not only very diverse, but completely relativistic. It seems there is no way to know the world objectively, that is, as it really is." She pauses, then continues, "Furthermore, all religions are culturally conditioned. No religion is more true than any other. . . the benefit of religion is in how well it helps people cope with life."



HALEY DORM-ROOM 505

Before studying one evening, you're watching re-runs with friends. At the end of a public service announcement about AIDS awareness and safe sex, the narrator says, "Of course, abstinence is the best way to avoid AIDS" –the comment elicits several groans from the group. Wanting to understand the response, you ask Dan—the outspoken guy from down the hall—what he thinks about abstinence. He's glad you asked; "The only people who push abstinence are sexually repressed, and eager to force their morality on everybody," he says. "No one else can tell me what's good for me—much less what's right or wrong."



DISCUSS

1. Do you agree with Dan and Professor Burns?
2. Who or what are Professor Burns and Dan relying on to make their judgments?
3. How would you respond in each situation?

After his cabinet had voted NO on emancipation of slaves, President Lincoln raised his right hand and said, "The ayes have it!"

Why do you think it is sometimes a little embarrassing to admit you believe something simply because the Bible says so?

KEY IDEA

The Christian must know and rely on the Bible to overcome doubts and opposition.



PERSONALIZE

1. What do you think motivated Paul to keep pressing on in his belief in, and communication of, Christ to such a diverse and skeptical group?
2. How does Paul's example of standing up for Christ affect your confidence in Christ and your motivation for communicating the Gospel in a relativistic culture?
3. Write down one thing you have learned from this study, and one thing you will do as a result.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.