



How Does Belief Work?

Acts 17:16-34
Paul's reasoning in Athens

1. Everyone lives by faith.

"People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious." Acts 17:22

Paul would say to today's culture: All human beings have to live on the basis of answers to certain questions. Where have we come from? What are we here for? Where are we going? How should I be living? Whatever your answers are to any those questions, they are your personal beliefs. In other words you can't prove them. You accept them by faith.

Let's say you're an atheist or an agnostic. You say, "*I don't have any religious beliefs. I work off of reason.*" Well then, can you prove there is no God? Can you prove there's no afterlife? Of course you can't. It's a leap of faith, because in the end, you can't prove it.

Author Tim Keller: We live in a secular Western society, which is the first society probably in history that doesn't believe it has beliefs. "*We're just being rational,*" people say. What they don't see is that deep down they're living their life on the basis of faith beliefs that are no more empirically based than other religious beliefs.

2. Everyone lives with moral imperatives

"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he **reasoned** in the synagogue ... as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there [including Epicurean and Stoic philosophers]." Acts 17:16,17

Paul reasons with people in order to persuade them.

²²To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:22,23

I think if Paul came today he'd say, "*Let me show you that you are worshiping the God you don't believe in without even knowing it.*"

How might he do that? Post-modern, secular minded people, do not believe there are moral absolutes that we all have to follow. They say, we determine morality for ourselves, subjectively and individually.

Here's where Paul would reason with them, when they use words like *right* and *wrong*, he'd point out that they are being, at best, disingenuous and illogical and, at worst, hypocritical.

If you don't believe in God and moral absolutes you have to stop saying, "This is wrong." **Rather you can say**, "*I prefer you not kill people. I prefer you not rape people, but I can't really say it's wrong.*" But Paul would say, "*Of course you believe it's wrong. You can't help but believe that's wrong. Nor could anyone else.*"

A moral feeling is, "*I feel this is wrong.*"

A moral obligation is, "You must not do it, whether you feel it's wrong or not."

Paul would say, you're ignorant of the fact that right and wrong are absolutes, and absolutes come from God and you're not acknowledging him.

3. Someone has to tell them about the Living God. (And let the chips fall where they may)

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 human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

Acts 17:24-28

Paul says, "*This is a creator God. This is a God who's not dependent on anything, but everything is dependent on him and this is a God who wants a relationship with you.*"

²⁹Therefore 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 human design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Acts 17:29, 30

What God is saying?

"God has overlooked these times of ignorance and rebellion, this time of agnosticism. God has been very patient. God is now declaring to people, everywhere you should repent from your sin.

Why? For 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 everyone by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:31

This is the time now, folks. The judgment day has been declared. The day is fixed and the judge is appointed. Jesus, then, came out of the grave for two purposes: to save those who repent and embrace Him as Savior, to judge those who don't.

What happened?

When 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. ³⁴Some of the people 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. Acts 17:32-34