

**Week Four - Catalyst Four: Pluralism**  
**Acts 17:16-34**

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day One**

1. Look up John 17:14-15. What do you think Jesus means by saying his followers are not “of” this world?
2. Trying to be a Christian in a sinning world can lead to some complicated situations. Christian theologian H. Richard Niebuhr came up with a spectrum of categories for how Christian faith interacts with the culture around it. You can read an article with a chart about it here: [www.waystogrowingod.org/tag/christ-and-culture/](http://www.waystogrowingod.org/tag/christ-and-culture/). Here is a summary:
  - Christ Against Culture— All culture is sinful and good Christians will abstain from engaging with it, whether that’s TV shows or politics.
  - Christ and Culture in Paradox— Culture is generally sinful and good Christians will try to limit the damage, but know that society won’t ever be completely fixed this side of heaven.
  - Christ Transforms Culture— Culture without God’s influence is sinful, but good Christians will work to change society to match God’s values.
  - Christ Above Culture— Culture is under God’s authority whether it likes it or not; some of it is good and some is bad, but good Christians will follow God’s rules, regardless.
  - Christ of Culture— Culture tends to become better and better and God’s principles are consistent with many cultural values. Good Christians follow Christ’s example and live out faith and culture in harmony.

Which one of these categories do you think is the best way for Christians to interact with the world? Why? Which of these attitudes do you think is the most popular one in our society?

3. 100 years ago, most Protestant Christian believers followed the “of” category. After the evil exposed in the World Wars, most Protestants shifted to the “transforms” approach. However, with the collapse of traditional morality in the U.S., it now seems like the “paradox” understanding is probably the most realistic. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the paradox approach to faith and culture?
4. The idea that Christ transforms culture leads to a hope for a Christian nation. How does embracing the paradox paradigm change our goals for living a Christian witness in an increasingly pluralistic world?
5. Conclude your FIFTEEN by praying that God’s good news would be proclaimed in a world and in a country that exists in tension with belief in Him. Ask Him to help you be an effective witness in an unbelieving world.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two**

6. As our society becomes more pluralistic, it starts to resemble the early church in pluralistic Rome. Read about how Paul engaged with this kind of culture in Acts 17:16-23.
7. What beliefs and practices existed in Athens at that time? What was Paul’s method for engaging with them?

8. Based on Richard Niebuhr's spectrum of Christ vs. Culture (see Week Four – Day One of Growing Deeper for reference), in which category would Paul's method fall?
9. We live in a country with an increasing number of non-Christians. Even many Christians hold beliefs with which we would not agree. How can we follow Paul's example as we interact with people around us?
10. How can we find ways to honor people, even those with whom we fundamentally disagree?
11. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to give you compassion and empathy for those who do not believe the same things you do. Ask Him to help you engage respectfully in the public square, just like Paul did in Athens.

### **Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three**

12. Christians will always live in paradox, or tension, with their culture. See one example of this tension when Pilate argues with Jesus in John 18:36-37. How is Jesus' kingdom different from any earthly nation?
13. Earthly nations are under the power of the sword; they require military might to enforce their rule. Contrarily, what is the core principle of Christ's kingdom? See Matthew 5:44 for help with this question.
14. Christians still have responsibilities as citizens of an earthly kingdom. Read Jeremiah's command to God's believers in a foreign country in Jeremiah 29:4-7.
15. Considering that Babylon was an extremely pagan and unfriendly culture, how might this instruction have been counter-intuitive?
16. Many prominent Christian theologians (such as neo-conservative Richard Neuhaus) consider America to be the new Babylon. Based on the passage from Jeremiah, what does this mean for how an American Christian should live his/her life?
17. As you finish your FIFTEEN, ask for God's guidance as you build a life and a home in a society that both parallels and contradicts God's Word. Ask for discernment to live in a way that radiates your hope in Jesus without being overshadowed by the comforts of non-Biblical values.

### **Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four**

18. How do we try to enforce Christian morality in a pluralistic nation? Should there be laws forcing people to hold Christian beliefs? Should there be a law requiring everyone to go to church on Sunday? How about a law forbidding murder? What do you think is the difference between those two?

19. Read Paul's point about judging the morality of non-believers in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. Where does Paul think our focus should be?
  
20. What guiding principle should there be, then, for doing our duty as citizens of the United States and as citizens of God's kingdom? Spend some time looking up the following verses. List the principles each addresses. What common theme do they have for guiding our earthly efforts?
  - a. Micah 6:8
  
  - b. Zechariah 7:8-10
  
  - c. Deuteronomy 16:18-20
  
  - d. Proverbs 29:7
  
21. While we cannot force people to be believers, we can uphold standards of justice in how we vote or influence the thinking of those around us. What are some examples of injustice that are systemic in our society today?
  
22. End your FIFTEEN by thanking God for giving us His good law and instruction in the Bible. Ask Him to help you stand up for justice in His name.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five**

23. Look again at Paul's witness to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-34. Focus especially on the last three verses.
  
24. What is the variety of responses we can expect when we share our faith in Christ?
  
25. When was the last time you had the opportunity to personally share your faith with someone else? How did it go? What was his or her response?
  
26. How common is the opportunity to actually talk to another person about God and not just a societal or political issue about morality?
  
27. How much time did Paul spend talking about the Athenians' morality?
  
28. When it comes to correcting the morality of others or speaking about our relationship with our God, which should be the priority? What would that look like, practically, in your daily routine?
  
29. Close your final FIFTEEN the week in prayer, giving praise to God for the time and place in which He has put you.

Ask Him to help you be an effective witness to His saving grace.