

Title: **"Imagine . . . No Religion": Is Religion the Problem or the Solution?**

Text: **Acts 21:15-36**

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Big Idea

We all know the world is broken and divided. We want peace in this place, we want a world "as one." But how do we get it? Some people say we should get rid of religion. But, as Paul in our text shows us: we don't need to get rid of religion; we need to get the real thing in Jesus!

"It is possible that mankind is on the threshold of a golden age; but, if so, it will first be necessary to slay the dragon that guards the door, and this dragon is religion." - Bertrand Russell

1. Religion Is the Problem

A quick read of our text might lead us to agree with Russell. It seems like religion is the problem. It's causing the conflict, the uproar, the violence. For this, I'm looking particularly at these Jews who are coming against Paul in the temple down in vv. 27-36.

I wonder: Have you ever gotten stirred up over matters of religion? Have you ever spoken unkindly, angrily to a person who believed differently than you? You may not have dragged them out of your house and beat them over the head—but maybe you stopped smiling at them when you passed by in the hall at the office, maybe you stopped inviting them to lunch, maybe you stopped calling them. You cut off contact in some way. After all, why would you want to hang out or associate yourself with someone who thinks that way? You might not kill them, but they're dead to you. You slam shut the gates of your heart the way these Jews slam shut the gates of the temple.

2. Religion Is Not the Problem

Is Paul religious? You better believe he is—radically so. He's what today we might call a "Bible-thumper," a "Jesus freak," a "religious fanatic." His whole life is consumed with his faith. And yet, and here's the critical point, it doesn't seem to have made him more divisive and an-

gry and contentious. No, it's made him more kind, and humble, flexible—ready and willing to hang out with anyone, and serve them. In other words, it's made him just the kind of person this world needs, if we truly want peace.

3. The Real Solution to the Real Problem

Ironically, I think the real problem with the Jews in our text isn't that they have religion, it's that their religion doesn't go deep enough. It's too superficial. There's a problem beneath the problem of religion. We handle our religion inappropriately because something's off in our hearts. It has to do with where we're looking to find our significance and worth and identity.

We can take up almost anything and use it as a stick to prop ourselves up and beat others down: your politics, your work, your science, your race, your culture, your wealth, your class, your education, your parenting style, your looks, and on it goes. It's not just religion that's causing the problem. It's the human heart.

Jesus and the gospel—this is the one thing that, if you truly take it into the center of your life, it won't make you oppressive or imperialistic or judgmental. Instead, it'll make you compassionate and kind and self-sacrificial. If you get the gospel to your core, on the one hand, you'll no longer feel like you need to prop yourself up, prove you're worth, show your value. You know you're loved. You know you're valued. That's what the cross tells you. But, on the other hand, neither will you feel the need to look down your nose at others and tear people to the floor. You know you're no better. You're loved and saved by grace just like they can be. The cross comforts you and crushes you at the same time. And do you want to know what else it does? It makes you the kind of person this world so desperately needs.



Reflection Questions

- In what way do you see religion causing problems in the world today? In what way would you say it can and should be the solution (in Jesus!)?
- Look at the questions under the first heading. Answer them honestly. Where are you still tempted to look down your nose at others? How does the gospel show you a better way?

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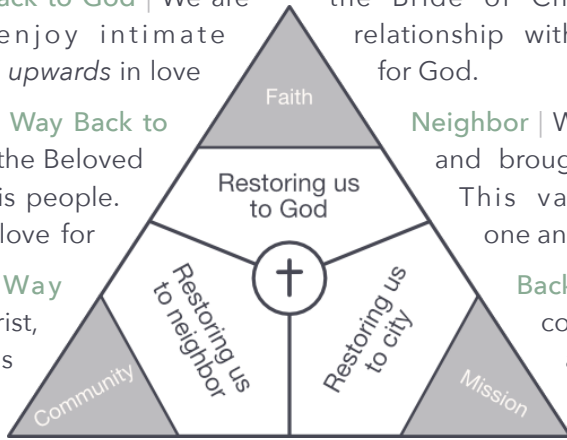
Our Mission & Values

Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.

FAITH: The Way Back to God | We are redeemed to enjoy intimate relationship with him. This value presses our church *upwards* in love for God.

COMMUNITY: The Way Back to Christ, adopted in the Beloved relationship with his people. This value presses our church *inwards* in love for Neighbor | We are the Family of and brought into covenantal relationship with his people. This value presses our one another.

MISSION: The Way the Embassy of Christ, Savior to be his ambassadors. This value presses our church *outwards* in love for the Back to City | We are commissioned by the unbelieving.



Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.
We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

All Church Campout - Open Registration!

We are excited to announce that we will again be hosting our All Church Campout at Mount Madonna County Park over the weekend of June 26-28! We have a huge group campsite all to ourselves and lots of options in the park for having fun together. Whether you love to camp or you'd rather still sleep in your own bed, we have something for everyone. Because the park is only a 45 minute drive from south San Jose, people can feel free to come and go as it works with their schedule and preference.

- **Option #1: Day-Use:** For those not wanting to camp but still wanting to participate, the Day-Use option is best. You can come in for the day, enjoy activities, meals, etc., and then head home to your warm bed while the rest of us "rough" it :).
- **Option #2: Camp:** This option is for those who want the full camping experience. We have the site for Friday and Saturday nights. You can choose to camp for one or both of these depending upon your availability and desire.

Scan the QR code below for more info and to find a link to sign up!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

Women's Panel & Brunch (5/2) - RSVP Today!

Support the Nicaragua Team!

All Church Prayer - Cancelled Tonight

Scan the QR code below for more info and clickable content!

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