



# Other Paths to God?

Comparison of Christianity and world religions

Lesson 1 Introduction

# Why I chose this topic

- **Hindu proverb:**

*There are hundreds of paths up the mountain,  
all leading in the same direction,  
so it doesn't matter which path you take.*

*The only one wasting time is the one  
who runs around and around the mountain,  
telling everyone that his or her path is wrong.*

- **This is a prevalent belief in our society, sometimes even among those professing Christianity**
- Christians are criticized as intolerant for not accepting that all religious beliefs are equally valid

# What do we know?

- **John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**
- During encounters with those of different faiths, just quoting this scripture will not be effective in:
  - Causing them to question the credibility of their beliefs
  - Converting them to the Gospel
- Knowing about other religions is not necessary for your salvation, but could be a valuable tool in reaching those of different faiths

# Importance of understanding the beliefs and faiths of non-Christians:

- Strengthen and verify within us the truth our faith
- Being prepared to address the logical issues and inconsistencies in the beliefs of non-Christians
- Being prepared to provide God's answers to the very questions their belief system fails to answer

# Are there spiritual dangers?

- Proverbs 18:17 (NIV)  
In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines
- Studying other religions or criticisms of Christianity without being a strong Christian or having support of other Christians could undermine your faith
- To avoid being misled ourselves, we need Bible knowledge and wise Christians to guide us through proper reasoning and accurate, verified information
- **The truth about God can be found and the worldview maze successfully navigated by testing various truth claims and systematically pushing aside falsehoods so that only the truth remains**

# American History

- The United States was founded by Christians and the Constitution reflects the Christian beliefs of our Founders
- For much of our history, non-Christians were a tiny minority of those in the United States (excepting Native Americans)
  - Some of us remember those days
- The growth of immigration from non-Christian nations combined with a greater global awareness through travel and communication have confronted Christians in the United States with the reality of diversity in faith and practice

# How has this changed the U.S.?

- Infiltration and acceptance of false ideas is prevalent
  - What examples can you think of?
- We have new opportunities for evangelism

# How have Christians responded to this diversity of religions?

- Universalism
- Relativism
- Inclusivism
- Exclusivism

# Universalism

- All religions are more or less equal, with no one religion able to claim supremacy
- Examples used:
  - Paths up the mountain – all lead to the same mountain top
  - Blind men describing elephant - each religion only has a portion of the truth
- There is no Biblical support for this view
  - Old Testament - God is set in opposition to the gods of the surrounding peoples
  - New Testament - “no one comes to the Father except by me”

# Problems with Universalism

- Different religions proclaim different and contradictory “truths”
  - Some religions are monotheistic, while others are polytheistic or pantheistic
  - Some believe that life is cyclical, while others hold to a linear view
- Arguing that all religions only have part of the truth requires having access to all the truth to know which parts are true
- No need for proselytizing, since no religion could be judged as better than another

# Relativism

- Relativism claims that all religions have their own truths
- Religions are not different paths up one mountain but different mountains altogether
- There is no universal truth by which to judge the truths of the various religions

# Problems with Relativism

- Proceeds on the idea that “ultimate or universal truth is non-existent”
  - Internal contradiction: The claim there is no “universal truth” is a “universal truth”
  - Christ not only claimed to be “the way” but also “the truth”
- No need for proselytizing, since no religion could be judged as better than another
  - Jesus called his followers to go throughout the world making disciples
- Incapable of condemning any action or attitude, since there is no standard by which to judge
  - In relativism, acts of terrorism and acts of charity are equally valid ways to demonstrate one’s commitment to religion

# Inclusivism

- Christianity is the supreme religion, but other religions have “truths” that will ultimately lead them to God
- Some proponents argue that sincere worshippers in other religions may be saved if they follow their religion and never have a chance to hear of Christ and Christianity
- Example:
  - a devout Muslim who never hears of Christ may be saved by following the “inspired truths” in the Quran
- Other proponents argue that a Muslim may put faith in Christ but continue to practice as a Muslim because of the inspired truths in the Quran
  - Can you think of a Biblical example regarding this idea?

# Inclusivism, other problems

- Does not take seriously the biblical teaching that salvation is in Christ alone
- There are no biblical examples of a person being saved without knowledge of Christ
- Proponents fail to incorporate the biblical teaching of conversion through baptism
- Baptism includes rebirth, which enables believers to turn from their sinful ways and turn to serve Christ alone.
- One of the evidences of Baptism is a rejection of false religion to embrace biblical Christianity

# Exclusivism

- Fully supported by the Bible
  - One true religion and only one way of salvation
- Though other religions may have some truths in them, they are not saving truths
- Other religions are sourced in man's rebellion against God and/or demonic influence
- Encourages proselytizing since it is the only hope for adherents of other religions to be saved

# Wrongly teaching Exclusivism

- A potential danger is that we may develop an arrogant attitude that assumes possession of the truth entails superiority
  - We do not have the truth because we have greater intelligence, morality, or wealth, but because we received grace and mercy
  - Salvation is a work of God graciously given to unworthy sinners, so those who have been saved have no grounds for boasting
- We should desire to see others experience that same grace and mercy (The Great Commission)
- The wrong attitude or disrespectful explanations to non-Christians are likely to be counterproductive
  - Will you attract more flies with honey or vinegar?

# Different answers to a particular issue is not unique to the topic of religion

- Give 100 math students a complex problem to solve
- It is likely that there will be several different answers
- **Does that mean that a correct answer does not exist?**
- Those that get the answer wrong need to be shown their error and shown the techniques necessary to arrive at the correct answer
- It is our charge to provide non-Christians with respectful, logical explanations of truth and error as they relate to God
- Sadly, true belief is a matter of the will, and no matter how much logical evidence is presented, some will still choose to deny the God who is there and miss the one true path to harmony with Him

# Most widely practiced religions

1. Christianity (2.1 billion)
2. Islam (1.3 billion)
3. Hinduism (900 million)
4. Chinese traditional religion (394 million)
5. Buddhism 376 million
6. Primal-indigenous (300 million)
7. African traditional and Diasporic (100 million)
8. Sikhism (23 million)
9. Juche (19 million)
10. Spiritism (15 million)
11. Judaism (14 million)
12. Bahai (7 million)
13. Jainism (4.2 million)
14. Shinto (4 million)
15. Cao Dai (4 million)
16. Many others

# Other belief systems that could be studied as a religion

- Atheism
- Science is God
- Radical environmentalism
  - Man is responsible for current “climate change”
- Evolution eliminates the need for God

# World Religions

Religion	Percentage
Christianity	31.5%
Islam	23.2%
Hindu	15%
Buddhism	7.1%
Judaism	0.2%
None	16.3%
Others	6.7%

# What we will explore

1. Existential relevancy. How do other religions answer the following?:
  1. Origin – where did we come from?
  2. Ethics – how should we live?
  3. Meaning – what is the purpose for life?
  4. Destiny – where is mankind heading?
2. Logical consistency—the claims of a belief system must logically cohere to each other and not contradict in any way
3. Empirical adequacy—is there evidence to support the belief system?

Next week  
Islam

