

**Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 3
Missions and Evangelism
Week 4 – Evangelism, Part 2**

Introduction

Today’s Cultural Climate

The way it was	The way it is
<p>1. Spiritual background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominal Christian experience- most people had some exposure to the Christian world view. • Information such as "The Four Spiritual Laws" provided compelling reason to receive Christ. While many never heard the gospel, people did believe the basic concepts of a just and loving God, "true moral guilt," and forgiveness. A clear presentation of the Gospel put these concepts together in a way that often made sense to this critic. 	<p>1. Spiritual background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little significant exposure to the church • Many people mix and blend different faiths to arrive at what they believe (e.g. New Age). It is common to hold that all faiths are equally true. Note: unfortunately, even many with an evangelical church background have bought into this. • Today's perspective is that we are not able to call things morally right and wrong (it is not "politically correct"). People today will say that assigning true moral guilt to someone or some situation is "intolerant;" rather, we should be open to everything. Therefore the Gospel message doesn't fit with this perspective.
<p>2. What the critics thought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically minded skeptics appealed to reason and evidence (especially science). • Christians would defend their faith (apologetics) using classical arguments (design of the universe, design of man, and the study of 'how we know what we know') or evidence (historical evidence for the resurrection, for the reliability of the Bible, etc.). The rational critic would often find these types of arguments persuasive. 	<p>2. What the critics think</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically minded skeptics find the claims and content of Christianity dogmatic and offensive. Christianity can't possibly be universally true because it excludes other religious voices and traditions. "Hmmm, that's great for you, but you can't impose your truth on me." Truth and reason bounce off many people today. • Christians still need to make use of classical arguments and evidences, but also need to be able to defend the notion of absolute truth and critique relativism. Therefore it will take more patience and "pre-evangelism" is often needed.

Two views of "truth"

1.

2.

Truth is objective, not merely subjective (Rom. 3:4).

It is absolute, not relative (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5,6; Rev. 7:9,10).

It is antithetical, not synthetic (Matt. 12:30; Ex. 20:1-6).

Truth is a bestowal of God's grace, not my propaganda.

Two definitions of "tolerance"

1. BIBLICAL: Personal respect and love for individuals _____
_____.

2. CONTEMPORARY:

The impact of postmodernism and the new tolerance on our day-to-day lives:

Important Communication Guidelines

1. Find common ground.

Why is connecting on common ground important?

Key areas of common ground with the post-modern world:

- Human subjectivity:
- Inadequacy of reason alone
- The myth of “progress”
- Critique of racism and sexism
- Concern for the environment

What are the limitations of communicating *only* on common ground?

2. Pick carefully what to disagree with.

3. Be patient. Our culture is biblically illiterate.

- It takes people longer to understand and make an informed decision about the Gospel.
- We must shift our thinking from "event evangelism" to "process evangelism."
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4. Seek to understand and tell your story.

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5. Remember the witness of Christian community.

Objection 1: “How can you say that Christianity is the only valid religion?”

A.

(Steve Turner) "We believe that all religions are basically the same . . . They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation."¹

	WHAT IS GOD?	OUR SPIRITUAL DILEMMA	WHAT IS SALVATION?	THE WAY OF SALVATION
CHRISTIANITY	Personal & Trinitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Conscious, personal fellowship with God for all eternity	Receive the gift of God’s forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ
Judaism	Personal & Unitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Conscious, personal fellowship with God for all eternity	Turn to God & live a moral life
ISLAM	Personal & Unitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Enter Paradise for an eternity of sensual pleasure	Perform the 5 Pillars of Faith
HINDUISM	Pantheistic or Polytheistic	Ignorance that all is one	Freedom from conscious, individual existence (“moksha”)	Better reincarnation by improving karma
BUDDHISM	Pantheistic or Atheistic	Ignorance that all is one	Freedom from conscious, individual existence (“nirvana”)	Escape reincarnation by following 4 Noble Truths & 8-Fold Path

Consider the conclusion of these scholars of world religions:

Anderson (Christian): “The fact is that generalizations about religion are almost always misleading. Nothing could be further from the truth than the dictum . . . ‘Religion has not many voices, but only one.’ . . . Even the most cursory examination of the theology of these different religions reveals far more contradiction than consensus.”²

Zaehner (Hindu): “To maintain that all religions are paths leading to the same goal, as is so frequently done today, is to maintain something that is not true . . . (T)he basic principles of East and West . . . simply are not starting from the same premises. The

¹ British journalist Steve Turner quoted by Ravi Zacharias in his Harvard lecture, "Is Atheism Dead? Is God Alive?" November, 1993.

² (Sir Norman Anderson, Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984, p. 15).

only common ground is that the function of religion is to provide release; there is no agreement at all as to what (we) must be released from. The great religions are talking at cross purposes.”³

Clendenin (Christian): “Contrary to the idea that all the religions teach the same thing, by virtue of their historical particularity and specificity the many religions offer us radically divergent pictures of God, the world, life, death, the afterlife, and humanity . . . Historically and empirically it is obvious that a common essence is precisely what religions do not have; they aim at different goals, teach contradictory doctrines, and prescribe radically different experiences. Religion as a common genus simply does not exist.”⁴

Netland (Christian): “It is difficult indeed to escape the conclusion that some of the central affirmations of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Shinto are opposed; as long as the meanings of the doctrines within the respective religious communities are preserved, they cannot be jointly accepted without absurdity.”⁵

Panikkar (Pluralist): “(Pluralists must abandon their quest for a common essence because) the incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable . . . (and any) alleged common denominator is a sheer reductionist abstraction.”⁶

Conclusion:

B.

(Daniel B. Clendenin) “Do we really want to say . . . that all religions and religious practices without exception are pathways to God? . . . What about Hindu widow-burning, female infanticide, or Aztec human sacrifice (Hans Kung notes that 20,000 people were sacrificed in four days at the consecration of a temple in Mexico in 1487)? . . . But in assessing religion, pluralists have the problem of avoiding radical relativism, which . . . is inherent in their position. In fact, consistent relativism would render both praise and blame impossible. As the pluralists themselves acknowledge, without some criteria it is impossible to distinguish between Jim Jones and Mother Theresa, between an Amish village and David Koresh's Waco compound. To make critical judgments of any sort requires some standard or standards, but to introduce such criteria in order to judge religions is to no longer accept them all as equally true and good.”⁷

C.

³ Colin G. Chapman, *The Case For Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), p. 143.

⁴ Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], pp. 64, 108)

⁵ Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 110, 111.

⁶ Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tigris, and the Gangis," in Hick and Kitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 110).

⁷ Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), pp. 50,51.

(Daniel B. Clendenin) “Pluralism . . . is incompatible with and even antithetical to any traditional account of religion. If the pluralist is right, then the adherents of all the major religions . . . are badly mistaken in their traditional understanding and practice of their various faiths. Consequently, a consistent pluralism requires a drastic revision . . . a genetic-like mutation, of all human religiosity as it has been conceived and lived throughout human history. It is obvious that such an absolutistic diagnosis and prescription are as theologically and culturally imperialistic as one can imagine . . . Pluralism's residual patronization lurks in the idea of a common essence. It suggests that the particularity of a religion's cumulative tradition really does not matter, that its many incongruities with other faiths are merely accidental or arbitrary. The more one emphasizes an essential core of religion, the less reason there is to take the particularities of a religion with genuine seriousness . . . Rather than a celebration of the world's heterogeneous and particular faiths which might inform and challenge one's religious worldview, we have here a suffocating homogeneity . . .”⁸

Objection 2: “Why should I regard the Bible as God's Word? What about all of the other scriptures?”

“Other scriptures”: Hinduism (*Rig Vedas; Upanishads*); Buddhism (*Pali Canon; Sutras; Tibetan Book of the Dead*); Confucianism (*Analects of Confucius*); Islam (*Quran*); Ba’hai (*Writings of Baha’u’llah*); Mormonism (*Book of Mormon*).

A.

- In the higher forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, god is not a person who speaks.
- Religions rooted in the Bible (including Islam and the Christian sects, like Mormonism) are virtually the only ones who claim to have books that are actual revelation from God.

B.

- Why is this so important?

(Isaiah 41:21,22) “Present your case,” the LORD says. “Bring forward your strong arguments,” The King of Jacob says. 22 Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; As for the former events, declare what they were, That we may consider them, and know their outcome; Or announce to us what is coming.

- “Isn’t the Bible full of undeniable historical errors?”

Evidence from archaeology:

Old Testament Example: Scholars considered the Genesis account of Abraham (including Sodom and Gomorrah) to be mythological or ahistorical.

⁸ Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], pp. 90, 108, 109.

But Ur was excavated and shown to be a flourishing city around 2000 BC. The Ebla Tablets include some of the kings mentioned in Gen. 14. Tell Mardikh tablets mention Sodom and Gomorrah.

New Testament Example: Scholars scoffed at Luke's references to Lysanius as tetrarch of Abilene (Lk. 3:1) because the only Lysanius known from ancient sources was executed in 36 BC—60 years before Luke's reference. But two Greek inscriptions from Abila, northwest of Damascus, now prove there was a "Lysanius the tetrarch" between the years AD 14 and 29.⁹

Evidence from Non-Christian sources of Jesus' miracle ministry:

- Josephus (Jewish historian, 70AD) called Jesus a "wonder worker"
- Teaching of Rabbis (1st & 2nd cent) claimed Jesus did his miracles by sorcery
- Celsus (philosopher/critic of Christianity) attributed Christ's miracles to sorcery

"Evidence from early Jewish and Gentile writers establishes for those who reject the witness of Christian writings, the historical character of Jesus himself. Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth', but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is a s axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories."¹⁰

- Other scriptures are historically inaccurate or do not interface with history at all.

The eastern scriptures:

The Koran:

The Book of Mormon:

⁹ Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Archeology and the New Testament," *The Expositor's Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 653.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 119.

C.

(Isaiah 46:9,10) “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”

Predictions about the coming Messiah:

Time (Dan. 9:24,25)

Birthplace (Micah 5:2)

Rejected by His people (Isa. 53)

Mode of Execution (Ps 22:1-18)

What about other “scriptures” and prophecy?

Muhammad acknowledged that the biblical prophets were confirmed by miraculous signs (*Surahs 3:184; 17:103; 23:45*)—including prophecy, but when he was asked for similar confirmation that his message was from God, he refused (*Surahs 2:118; 4:153; 6:8,9,37*) and regarded the request as impious.¹¹

(Baha'u'llah) “In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. Thus hath it been decreed in the Tablets of God, and none can comprehend it except them whose sight is sharp. In like manner, the moment the word expressing my attribute ‘The Omniscient’ issueth forth from my mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, *be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences*, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time at the bidding of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Knowing.”¹²

Objection 3: "Why should I accept your interpretation of the Bible? Everyone has their own interpretation." See Christian Ministry 2 Using Your Bible, week 1 (hermeneutics).

Objection #4: "How can your religion consign people to hell if they have never even heard about Christ?"

¹¹ Norman Geisler, in Dean C. Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 1996), pp. 265, 266).

¹² Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings*, p. 142.

A. Will God condemn all those who have never heard the Gospel?

(C.S. Lewis) “. . . God has not told us what his arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no person can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.”¹³

- (Psalm 89:14) "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."

(Genesis 18:25) “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

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Romans 1:18-20

Romans 2:14,15

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- Old Testament believers were saved by their faith before the Jesus came.
- God may judge based on his knowledge of how people would have responded had they heard the message.

Conclusion:

Two important qualifications:

Qualification 1: Does this mean any unevangelized person who is a devout follower of his religion will be saved?

Qualification 2: If people can be saved apart from hearing the gospel, are evangelism and missions necessary?

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 65.

B. Even if someone without the Bible can be saved, how can a loving God judge anyone?

- God doesn't relish judging anyone (**Eze. 18:23,32**).
- God's judgment is _____ (not contradictory to) his love.

(Psa 89:14) Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before you.

(Jer 9:24) I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.

- A God who is indifferent to sin is _____.

C. Is God's judgment just?

- Can we trust our ability to judge what is fair for ourselves?
- Do we have a moral standard by which we can evaluate whether God's judgment is fair or unfair?

Additional resources: Learn more about common objections to Christianity from the Xenos Central Teaching series by the same title, available on our website (<http://www.xenos.org/teachings/topical/objections/>) or at the Xenos Study Center.

What could you do to help build and maintain an outreach ethos in your home group?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Maintain evangelism as an important “family value.”

Memory Verses

Matt. 28:18-20* – The Great Commission, in which Jesus commands the church to both evangelize and train people from every people group.

Assignment

Study for the exam.