

**Xenos Christian Fellowship  
Christian Principles Unit 4  
Week 9: Evangelism, Part 2**

**Religious Relativism: 3 Most Common Objections**

**Introduction**

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

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

**Important Communication Guidelines**

**1. Find common ground.**

Why is connecting on *common ground* important?

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

-

- 
- 
- 
- 

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

**2. Pick carefully what to disagree with.**

**3. Be patient.**

- 
- 
- 

**4. Seek to understand and tell your story.**

- 

**5. Remember the witness of Christian community.**

**1 Peter 3:15**

**OBJECTION #1: "How can you say that Christianity is the only valid religion?"**

Key Presupposition: "All religions are simply different paths to the same goal."

**1. Religions make contradictory claims concerning central beliefs (see CHART).**

	<b>WHAT IS GOD?</b>	<b>OUR SPIRITUAL DILEMMA</b>	<b>WHAT IS SALVATION?</b>	<b>THE WAY OF SALVATION</b>
<b>CHRISTIANITY</b>	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
<b>JUDAISM</b>	Personal & Unitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Conscious, personal fellowship with God for all eternity	Turn to God & live a moral life
<b>ISLAM</b>	Personal & Unitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Enter Paradise for an eternity of sensual pleasure	Perform the 5 Pillars of Faith
<b>HINDUISM</b>	Pantheistic or Polytheistic	Ignorance that all is one	Freedom from conscious, individual existence (“moksha”)	Better reincarnation by improving karma
<b>BUDDHISM</b>	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.” (Sir Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984, p. 15).

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

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

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

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

Conclusion:

## 2. Even religious relativists do not affirm all religious practices.

**(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." (Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords*, pp. 50,51).

## 3. Religious relativism ironically refuses to take religions seriously!

**(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 . . ." (Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords*, pp. 90, 108,109).

## OBJECTION 2: "Why should I regard the Bible as God's Word? What about all of the other scriptures?"

**Examples:** 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*).

### 1. Most other "scriptures" do not claim to be a revelation from God.

•

- 

## 2. Only the Bible is rooted in history.

Why is this so important?

- Archeology has substantially confirmed the Bible's historical reliability

For specific examples, see [Unit #3, Inspiration of the Bible](#)

- Other "scriptures" either do not interface with history, or they interface inaccurately.  
The Eastern scriptures

The Quran

The Book of Mormon

## 3. Only the Bible provides verifiable predictive prophecy.

ISA. 41:21 “Present your case,” says the LORD. “Set forth your arguments,” says Jacob’s King.  
 22 “Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, 23 tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear.

### FULFILLED MESSIANIC PROPHECY

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

**Baha'u'llah** (The Hidden Words, #63, about 1858): “O ye peoples of the world! Know ye verily that an unforeseen calamity is following you and that grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not the deeds ye have committed have been blotted out from My sight. By My beauty! All you doings hath My pen graven with open characters upon tablets of chrysolite.”

**For more on this objection, see Unit 3, Week 2;**  
<http://www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu3w2.htm>)

**OBJECTION #3: "Why should I accept your interpretation of the Bible? Everyone has his own interpretation." (see Unit 3, Week 4;**  
<http://www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu3w4.htm>)

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

**There are two distinct issues in this objection. It is important for you to understand which objection is being raised and respond to it.**

**1. “What about the person who never heard about Jesus or the Bible?”**

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

•

(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?"

(Rom. 4:15) . . . where there is no law there is no transgression.

•

(Romans 1:18-20) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Romans 2:14,15 (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

Acts 17:26-18 "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"

- 

**Another possibility:** God will judge based on his knowledge of how people would have responded had they heard the gospel.

**Two important qualifications:**

- This does *not* mean that any unevangelized person who is a devout follower of his religion will be saved!
- This does *not* mean that evangelism and missions are unnecessary!

**2. Is it fair for God to condemn people?**

- 
- 
- 
- 

**Memory Verses**

**Mat. 28:18-20\*** - The Great Commission.

**Assignment**

Complete the Personal Resource Survey. Please remember to review with your home group leader and have them sign the assessment. **THIS MUST BE COMPLETED TO OBTAIN CREDIT FOR UNIT #4!**

Copyright 2002, *Xenos Christian Fellowship*